2. Silius Italicus and the Conventions of Historical Epic at Rome

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Introduction

Within the history of classical Roman literature the Flavian age is unique because several epics from this time survive in (almost) complete form. Against this background Silius Italicus' *Punica* is often singled out for being the only extant epic about a topic from Roman history written during that period, alongside Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and Statius' *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* (although Statius and his father also composed non-surviving works on contemporary historical events; cf. Stat. *Silv*. 4.2.66–67; 5.3.199–204).[1] This fact gives rise to the question of potential reasons for Silius Italicus' choice of topic or sub-genre, its effect, and the resulting relationship to predecessors in the genres of epic and historiography. For some aspects of this complex no specific answers can be established due to the lack of meaningful evidence; still, there are various facets that can be fruitfully investigated, which should lead to a clearer view of the place of the *Punica* within the Roman literary tradition. Even though, after interest in this poet had returned,[2] issues such as the relationship between epic and historiography or Silius Italicus' intertextual engagement with predecessors have been studied in recent decades, particularly with respect to the shape of particular passages,[3]

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[1] The classification of Silius Italicus' poem as a 'Flavian epic' is meant to indicate its assumed date of completion, but not intended to imply assumptions about the period of composition or to restrict its interaction with the poet's lifetime to this period (see Wilson 2013, who questions the label 'Flavian'; for further discussion and specification of such labels, see Pomeroy 2016).

[2] On scholarship on Silius Italicus, see, e.g., Delz 1995; Ariemma 2000; bibliography in Augoustakis 2010.

[3] On aspects of intertextuality in Silius Italicus, see, e.g., Hartmann 2004; Ariemma 2009.

the generic dimension of such an interaction and the potential consequences for views on the development of Roman epic and historiography have not been fully explored.[4]

While historical epic (understood on a formal level as a description of epic narratives of historical events rather than exclusively of myths) is a more prominent category in ancient Rome than in Greece,[5] a study of Roman historical epic as a genre developing over time is faced with the issue that many items do not survive or only exist in fragments and that the extant examples are scattered over several hundred years and each seem to display individual characteristics (beyond the obvious feature of the historical subject matter presented in epic form). Therefore, rather than reviewing Silius Italicus' position in the tradition by looking at a series of identifiable themes or generic features, this study (responsive to the available material) will consider the main forerunners of Silius Italicus in Rome in chronological order and sketch similarities, differences and potential interaction where the evidence enables

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[4] For the importance of a generic perspective, see, e.g., Marks 2005, 528: "Yet however out-of-step or belated the *Punica* may seem to some today, its poet certainly did not see it as such. It embraces unapologetically the vast expanse of the epic tradition, both Roman and Greek, over which it gazes, and although its theme is drawn from the distant, historical past, it strives to speak to its times. Moreover, for rejecting the retreat of his contemporaries and successors into the world of Greek mythology, Silius appears all the less resigned to the marginalization of epic within the literary landscape of his day; to the contrary, it bespeaks of an earnest attempt to assert the abiding value and relevance of the genre to Rome's cultural heritage."

[5] As Nethercut (2020b) points out, apart from the content, historical and mythical elements are not very different from each other and share many formal and structural features (e.g. 2020b, 193: 'On the one hand, it is undoubtedly true that we have a number of poems written in dactylic hexameter in both Greek and Latin that treat events that were also narrated in prose historiography. On the other hand, it is difficult to isolate elements in these putative historical epics, aside from subject matter, that differentiate them from mythological epics like those of Homer.').

comparison. As Silius Italicus is well known to have been steeped in previous literature, he can be assumed to have been familiar with earlier Roman historical epics (directly and / or indirectly) and to have shaped his epic in creative engagement with them and with their reception by intermediaries (such as Vergil).[6] Such an analysis can form a basis for conclusions on the extent to which Silius Italicus can be said to follow in the footsteps of earlier writers of historical epic in Rome and to take up or modify features of the genre in the Roman tradition.[7] Thus, this discussion is not so much concerned with identifying specific allusions to particular scenes in earlier epics and their adaptation in Silius Italicus and rather with the appropriation of what may be defined as generic features of the literary form of

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[6] The relationship between epic successors and their Republican predecessors is explored in detail in Goldschmidt (2013) with respect to Vergil and Ennius. In that case it is pointed out that appropriation of a predecessor's features contributed to the earlier poet's eventual displacement (e.g. 2013, 11: But the fact remains that the *Aeneid*'s success was substantially responsible for Ennius' loss. As will become clear in the course of this study, one of the main reasons for that success was a competition that took the form of a deep and far-reaching appropriation of Ennius' role in Roman cultural memory; it is this that enabled the new poem to place its own narrative of the Roman past 'first' in the collective consciousness of Rome, and largely thereby dislodge the *Annales* from its canonical position.').

[7] Silius Italicus had recourse to more sources than those considered here, although there is some discussion in scholarship on the range and the relative importance of texts other than the main models (esp. Livy) and the respective role of poetic vs historical models (on Silius Italicus' sources, see e.g. Nicol 1936; Nesselrath 1986; Spaltenstein 1986a, xiii–xx; 1986b; 2006; Lucarini 2004; Pomeroy 2010; on the relationship and tension between historical and epic tradition, see Burck 1984; Marks 2005). Many scenes in the poem show signs of multiple intertextuality. These aspects will be disregarded here where the focus is on the interaction with predecessors that might reveal the role of the Roman epic tradition in the composition of Silius Italicus' poem.

historical epic in Rome and the approach to presenting historical events in epic style,[8] in a

format recently called 'verse-historiography' to indicate its status between epic and prose

historiography.[9]

Naevius

After Rome's first poet L. Livius Andronicus had introduced the genre of epic at Rome

through a Latin version of Homer's *Odyssey*, Cn. Naevius (*c.* 280/260–200 BCE) made the

genre more Roman by writing about an event from Roman history, the First Punic War

(*Bellum Poenicum*), claiming in the text of the poem that he participated in the conflict

himself (Gell. *NA* 17.21.45). While there were preceding Greek historical epics, Naevius can

thus be regarded as the founder of historical epic in Rome, i.e. of epics presenting themes

from Roman history (as he also introduced dramas on Roman history).[10] By writing about a

contemporary event (including its prehistory) and asserting autopsy, Naevius not only applies

the epic narrative model to historical events, but also incorporates elements of presentation

known from historiography, aimed at increasing the trustworthiness of the narrative.[11] In

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[8] The distinction between different types and functions of models, between 'Exemplary Model' and 'Model as Code', was first proposed by Conte (1986, 31) and has been widely adopted since.

[9] See Biggs 2020b.

[10] For an overview of the development of and the theory around Greek and Roman historical epic, see Häußler 1976; 1978. – On early Roman epic see e.g. Goldberg 1995.

[11] Naevius is said to have stated in the epic that he participated in the war described (Gell. *NA* 17.21.45; see e.g. Suerbaum 1968, 13–26; Biggs 2020a, 56–8). Autopsy was regarded as an element demonstrating reliability (cf., e.g., Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.71.1 and Liv. 22.7.4 on the early Roman historiographer Fabius Pictor, and the

addition to his own experiences Naevius will have accessed materials on the period to the extent that they existed, for instance oral tradition, Greek descriptions and basic records in Rome. The sources accessible to Naevius at the time were the same as those available to the early writers of historiography in Rome, which emerged as a literary genre (initially written in Greek) at about the same time.[12] The contemporaneous process and the overlap in subject matter presumably contributed to clarifying the characteristics of each literary genre and prompted the respective authors to select a specific way of presentation. Owing to the fragmentary state of Naevius' poem details of its shape can no longer be established, but some features of its structure and approach can still be discerned;[13] and these can form the basis for a comparison with Silius Italicus.

Silius Italicus does not refer to Naevius explicitly in the poem, in contrast to what he does in relation to other early epic writers (see below on Ennius). Yet, by writing about the Second Punic War Silius Italicus sets up a connection to Naevius' work on the First Punic War, while avoiding direct overlap in subject matter (as Ennius did to a certain extent with reference to Naevius).

What Silius Italicus does similarly to what can be observed in Naevius (and later in Virgil) is the combination of a focus on a particular event in the main narrative (First and Second Punic War respectively) with flashback to and foreshadowing of other periods, which

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parody at Sen. *Apocol.* 1; on this trope see e.g. Marincola 1997, 63–127). See also Esposito in this volume. – Keith in this volume discusses the ekphrasis in *Punica* 6 and points of contact with Naevius' poem.

[12] On the interaction of developments in Roman history and in the emergence of Roman epic in the Republican period see e.g. Leigh 2010; on the early Roman epics as elements in the development of literature at Rome see Feeney 2016.

[13] On the depiction of the Punic War in Naevius' epic see Biggs 2020a, 53–94.

opens up a larger historical dimension and creates an ideological connection between various developments. Thus, Naevius' epic, in addition to the main narrative about the First Punic War, covers the so-called archaeology, i.e. the early history of Rome, including Aeneas' journey from Troy to Italy, perhaps an encounter with Dido in Carthage and Romulus' founding of the city (Naev. *Pun.* F 5–29 *FPL*[4]).[14] Silius Italicus' epic, at its start, presents an aetiology of the causes of the Second Punic War on three levels (historical, mythical and divine: Sil. 1.21–139): one motivation of that war is referred back to Dido's founding of Carthage.

What is also first attested in Naevius (though again better known from Virgil) is the structure that, early in the poem, when the protagonists are in a difficult situation, the goddess Venus complains to Jupiter about their predicament (Naev. *Pun.* F 15–16 *FPL*[4]) and Jupiter gives a speech (for the benefit of Venus and the audience), calming her down with a positive outlook for the future. Fragments from Jupiter's speech have not been preserved, but Macrobius confirms the existence of such a scene for Naevius (Macrob. *Sat.* 6.2.31; cf. Virg. *A.* 1.223–96). Silius Italicus takes up the model of such a conversation (whether from Naevius or Virgil or both) and places it in the third book (as the first two books in his epic can be regarded as a kind of prelude) (Sil. 3.557–629). Moreover, Venus in Naevius and Virgil is worried about her son Aeneas, while in Silius Italicus she is concerned about his descendants. And, being written in the imperial period, Jupiter's prophecy in Silius Italicus has an extended section on the current imperial family (Sil. 3.594–629). In any case Naevius

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[14] On the way in which this section might have been inserted into the main narrative (straightforward chronological sequence or excursus with flashback), see e.g. Suerbaum 2002, 112–14 (with further references); on what might be inferred for the contents of this section on the basis of the extant fragments and on scholarly discussions about this issue see e.g. Barchiesi 1962 *ad loc.*; Feeney 1991, 108–9.

provides a precedent for involving divine intervention not only in mythical narratives, but also in the depiction of 'historical' events.

Ennius

Naevius was followed by Q. Ennius (239–169 BCE), who wrote works in all the literary genres Naevius cultivated and, in addition, established further literary forms in Rome (e.g., 'satire', philosophical writing). Ennius' epic was also a historical one, yet not a monograph on a single historical event; rather, it was an overview of Roman history from the beginnings to the poet's own time, entitled *Annales*. This epic (surviving in fragments) was much longer than that of Naevius, ultimately consisting of 18 books (almost like Silius Italicus' 17 books). Moreover, Ennius switched from the metre of the Saturnian, which his predecessors in the genre of epic in Rome (Livius Andronicus and Naevius) used, to the hexameter (Isid. *Etym.* 1.39.6; Schol. Bern. ad Virg. *G.* 1.477), which then became the canonical metre for Roman epic (both historical and non-historical).[15]

By late Republican times Ennius was regarded as more refined and sophisticated than the first Roman poets (e.g., Cic. *Brut*. 71–6) and seen as the true founder of Roman literature, as 'father Ennius' (e.g., Hor. *Epist*. 1.19.7, with Porph. *ad loc.*). Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that, even though there is less comparability in subject matter and structure, Ennius plays a larger role in Silius Italicus' epic, in that he appears as a fictionalized character in a

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[15] On Ennius' epic and the respective role of 'mythical' and 'historical' elements in the *Annales* see esp. Elliott 2013.

fighting scene (Sil. 12.387–419).[16] Silius Italicus' poem, being an epic about a previous phase of Roman history, when earlier writers were alive, enables such a conceit of presenting a literary predecessor as a character in the narrative. Ennius is not only introduced as a fighter, as the plot demands, but also as a poet favoured by Apollo, who is presented as praising Ennius as the first poet to sing of Italian wars (Sil. 12.410–13).[17] Beyond the circumstances of the specific scene, this characterization demonstrates the role in which Ennius is valued and sets him up as a forerunner for what Silius Italicus does when writing about the Second Punic War. Ennius' work is thus indirectly defined as a generic model of Roman historical epic for Silius Italicus.

Moreover, a broadly annalistic structure covering a long period of time as applied by Ennius provides a precedent for an epic with multiple and changing heroes in contrast to the character of the Homeric epics focussing on a smaller and more consistent group of protagonists throughout. While Silius Italicus' epic deals with a single event (like the Trojan War), the fact that the Second Punic War extends over many years combined with the annual nature of magistracies at Rome leads to a plurality of leaders over time in a mainly chronological arrangement (though including flashbacks and pauses), so that the protagonists change over the course of the narrative.

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[16] On that scene, see, e.g., Runchina 1982; Casali 2006; Manuwald 2007; Dorfbauer 2008. For an earlier, more general discussion of Ennius and Silius Italicus, based on broad assumptions, see Matier 1991; on Ennius and Silius Italicus, see also von Albrecht 2011, 90.

[17] Sil. 12.410–13: *hic canet illustri primus bella Itala versu / attolletque duces caelo, resonare docebit / hic Latiis Helicona modis nec cedet honore / Ascraeo famave seni* ('He shall be the first to sing of Roman wars in noble verse, and shall exalt their commanders to the sky; he shall teach Helicon to repeat the sound of Roman poetry, and he shall equal the sage of Ascra in glory and honour', trans. Duff).

In addition, Ennius covered Silius Italicus' theme of the Second Punic War in Books 7 and especially 8 and 9 of the *Annales*. Book 7 is believed to have been opened by a proem in the middle in which Ennius talks about this predecessor Naevius and asserts his artistic superiority as a more sophisticated poet (Enn. *Ann*. 206–12 Skutsch). Ennius belittles indirectly the poetic quality of his predecessor, while at the same time he seems not to have dwelt extensively on the First Punic War narrated in Naevius' poem (only a few fragments usually assigned to its description: Enn. *Ann.* 216–19 Skutsch). Thus, Ennius focuses on the Second Punic War and can thus be seen to highlight it as an important subject (as Silius Italicus does in the proem) and to continue a tradition of writing about the Punic Wars in Roman epic (initiated by Naevius). Ennius' focus on the Second Punic War might have contributed to Silius Italicus' decision to select this historical period as the subject matter for his epic and to give Ennius a prominent role in his poem.

In terms of motifs, Ennius' epic is reported to have included Jupiter promising the destruction of Carthage to the Romans (Serv. ad Virg. *A*. 1.20), Juno being appeased and beginning to favour the Romans (Serv. ad Virg. *A*. 1.281) and the origin of the Carthaginians referred back to Dido (Enn. *Ann*. 297 Skutsch; cf. also Enn. *Ann.* 472 Skutsch).[18] Thereby, Ennius demonstrates a paradigmatic way of combining a historical narrative with the approach of Homeric epic[19] and prefigures important story lines for the portrayal of the

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[18] These details about Ennius' epic are known from Servius' commentary on Vergil since Vergil interacts with these features (on the 'Punica' in Vergil's epic see Goldschmidt 2013, 102–48). In turn, this means that Silius Italicus' reception of Ennius is partly mediated by Vergili (see e.g. Casali 2006, 575–81).

[19] By reviewing potential reminiscences to Ennius and Lucan noted by earlier scholars and considering the approach to 'epic' and 'history' in Ennius, Lucan, and Silius Italicus, Häußler (1978, 148–86) concludes that Silius Italicus predominantly follows the Ennian model of combining epic and history, though adjusted by the

conflict with Carthage and its role in Roman history in Silius Italicus: for instance, the origin of the war is presented in epic terms when Juno is given a prominent role in motivating the Carthaginians to fight (Sil. 1.29–55) or Jupiter is shown announcing that the Romans will ultimately be victorious, but that he means to test them and their fighting prowess by this war (Sil. 3.570–629).

An additional minor point is that, although invocations to the Muse are present in Rome since Livius Andronicus, this poet employs the Roman term *Camena* (Liv. Andr. *Od.* F 1 *FPL*[4]); by contrast, according to the available evidence, Naevius is the first to refer to 'nine sisters' (Naev. *Pun*. F 1 *FPL*[4]), and Ennius is the first to appeal to the 'Muse' (Enn. *Ann*. 1 Skutsch). 'Muse' is the address used by Silius Italicus in the proem (Sil. 1.3).

Historical Epics between Ennius and Virgil

From the period between Ennius' *Annales*, of which at least a substantial number of fragments is still available, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, the earliest fully extant Roman epic, in Augustan times, there remains a sufficient number of testimonia about Roman historical epic to provide a sense of the reach of the genre and the preferred topics in this period (while there is a limited amount of fragments spread over a larger number of works, so that even fewer details are known for each individual work than for the epics of the earlier period by Livius Andronicus, Naevius and Ennius).[20] The extant testimonia confirm that in Rome historical epics, prominent from the start, remained popular and were produced throughout the active period of classical Latin literature, though the number of known works declines after the

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influence of intervening authors and the literary conventions of his time. On Ennius, see also Esposito in this volume.

[20] On the epics of this period (and their relationship to Ennius' *Annales*) see Nethercut 2020a.

Augustan period.[21] For the late Republican and early Augustan periods names of poets (e.g., Ov. *Pont*. 4.16) as well as the titles of epics have been preserved: most of the historical epics of this phase seem to be either *Annales* or monographs about recent wars (e.g., *Bellum Sequanicum*, *Bellum Siculum*, *Bellum Actiacum*).[22] These works include the epics Cicero wrote about himself and about his compatriot C. Marius, Cicero being another predecessor highly regarded by Silius Italicus (Sil. 8.404–11).[23]

The information about the epics of this period suggests that selecting a single historical event from the more distant past as the topic of an epic narrative (as Silius Italicus did) is a development initiated in the early imperial period and that in this context Virgil created a special variant by linking the mythical past with flashes forward up to the contemporary period.

Virgil

In generic terms Virgil's Augustan poem *Aeneid* occupies an ambiguous position between the poles of mythical and historical epic: while the story of the sack of Troy and Aeneas' journey to Italy dates to mythical times (even for contemporary Roman readers), the inserted forecasts of future developments extending to historical times (Virg. *A*. 1.254–96; 6.788–807; 8.679–96) present the events as an early stage of Roman history with implications for the present. Thus, apart from the fact that Virgil's *Aeneid* superseded Ennius' *Annales* as 'the Roman epic' and became a generic model for all later Roman epic writers, the *Aeneid* might

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[21] See, e.g., Schetter 1974, 63–4; Marks 2010a, 185–6.

[22] See conveniently the list of authors and titles in Marks 2010a and Nethercut 2020a; see also the overview in Nethercut 2020b, 195.

[23] See also Marks 2010a, 197.

have been a more specific precedent for Silius Italicus: it provided an example of making statements about the present time and the current emperor (however understood) without talking about contemporary issues directly; and it showed how an earlier phase of Roman 'history' could be presented as a model and as a step in developments leading to the present time. This adaptable structure of the *Aeneid* resulted in it being a different type of epic compared with a poem on the contemporary emperor as adumbrated in the proem to the third book of the *Georgics* (Virg. *G.* 3.16–48).

Ancient authors roughly contemporary with Silius Italicus report that he adored and celebrated Virgil.[24] These notices suggest that Virgil was the most highly regarded poet for Silius Italicus and that he also appreciated Cicero. In Silius Italicus' epic, Mantua, Virgil's birthplace, is highlighted as the home of the Muses and as a match for one of the purported birthplaces of Homer (Sil. 8.593–4);[25] such a comparison puts Virgil on a par with Homer,

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[24] Plin. *Ep.* 3.7.8: *multum ubique librorum, multum statuarum, multum imaginum, quas non habebat modo, verum etiam venerabatur, Vergili ante omnes, cuius natalem religiosius quam suum celebrabat, Neapoli maxime, ubi monimentum eius adire ut templum solebat* ('In each of them he had quantities of books, statues and portrait busts, and these were more to him than possessions—they became objects of his devotion, particularly in the case of Virgil, whose birthday he celebrated with more solemnity than his own, and at Naples especially, where he would visit Virgil's tomb as if it were a temple', trans. Radice); Mart. 11.48: *Silius haec magni celebrat monumenta Maronis, / iugera facundi qui Ciceronis habet. / heredem dominumque sui tumulive larisve / non alium mallet nec Maro nec Cicero* ('Silius, who possesses the acres of eloquent Cicero, honors this monument of great Maro. No other heir and proprietor of his tomb or dwelling would either Maro or Cicero choose', trans. Shackleton Bailey).

[25] Sil. 8.593–4: *Mantua, Musarum domus atque ad sidera cantu / evecta Aonio et Smyrnaeis aemula plectris* ('Mantua, the home of the Muses, raised to the skies by immortal verse, and a match for the lyre of Homer', trans. Duff).

who is praised separately elsewhere in the epic (Sil. 13.778–97), as an exemplar of an epic poet par excellence.[26] The passage thus implies that Silius Italicus admired Virgil for providing a model of Roman epic poetry, not for commonality of subject matter.

Accordingly, Silius Italicus is likely to have engaged closely with Virgil's work, and, beyond the take-up of phrases or generic scenes, he might have reacted to the status of Virgil's poem between mythical and historical reality and some of its structural features.[27] For instance, by employing flashback and foreshadowing, Virgil's *Aeneid* is effectively a work on the whole of Roman history from the fall of Troy to the poet's own time. Silius Italicus' poem aspires to a similar dimension and outlook, with proportions shifted: the main narrative is about a historical period closer in time, but the periods before and after are also covered by the same techniques, such as the flashback on Dido's role for the causes of the conflict (Sil. 1.21–139) or Jupiter's speech on the future of Rome (Sil. 3.571–629).

It this context it might be noteworthy that the start of Silius Italicus' narrative, when the scene is set with a description of the surroundings in Carthage, has two lines recalling the introduction of Carthage in the proem to Virgil's *Aeneid* (Sil. 1.81–2; Virg. *A*. 1.12–13).[28] The verbal allusion marks a connection while at the same time Silius Italicus differs by developing the notion further: in his poem these lines form the start of a description of a

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[26] On Silius Italicus' use of Greek epic, see, e.g., Pomeroy 2016.

[27] On Silius Italicus and Virgil, see, e.g., von Albrecht 1964, 166–84; 2006, 101. On Silius Italicus' rewriting of 'Virgil's vision', see Pomeroy 2000 and Schroer in this volume.

[28] Sil. 1.81–2: *urbe fuit media sacrum genetricis Elissae / manibus et patria Tyriis formidine cultum, /...* ('In the centre of Carthage stood a temple, sacred to the spirit of Elissa, the foundress, and regarded with hereditary awe by the people', trans. Duff); cf. Virg. *A*. 1.12–13: *urbs antiqua fuit (Tyrii tenuere coloni) / Karthago, ...* ('There was an ancient city, the home of Tyrian settlers, Carthage, …' trans. Fairclough and Goold).

temple to Dido in Carthage, which holds images of the ancestors of the Carthaginians and is where Hannibal's father makes his son swear an oath that he would bring destruction to the Romans (Sil. 1.81–139). This sketch immediately goes to the heart of the conflict and demonstrates how, by means of such a flashback, the detail concerning Dido (already present in the Republican epics and particularly prominent in Virgil) has been adapted to the focus of Silius Italicus' epic, so that this feature has even been seen as a development of threads included in Virgil's poem.[29]

Lucan

There is, however, not a straight line from Virgil to Silius Italicus since they are separated from each other by the literature produced in the intervening decades, especially by the epic *Bellum civile* or *Pharsalia* (on the civil war at the end of the Republican period) by the Neronian poet Lucan.[30] This piece, another historical epic, in some ways sets a kind of precedent for Silius Italicus: it presents a single event that is not contemporary and instead dates to the Republican past, although in this case there is a time difference of about 100 years between the event depicted and the time of composition rather than about 300 years, and the civil war at the end of the Republican period depicted in this epic is an immediate precondition for the political circumstances in Lucan's time. Lucan's poem, the first fully extant epic from post-Augustan times, is also the only surviving example of writing about a

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[29] Thus Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy 1986, 2493–501.

[30] On Silius and Lucan, see Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy 1986, 2501–4, who highlight the ability to shape history as epic and the values shown in defeat; Marks 2010b, who emphasizes their shared focus on civil war and the connection of allusions to Lucan with the losing side. See also Lanzarone in this volume.

past period of Republican history in imperial times and of including veiled (and controversially discussed) comments on the current emperor (Luc. 1.33–66).

The main feature famously distinguishing Lucan from Vergil and Silius Italicus is the presentation of gods. This was apparently one reason why ancient authorities commented on the genre of Lucan's piece: later commentators stated that Lucan had not composed a poem and did not deserve to be regarded as a poet since he had written history, though they do not explain why they arrived at this verdict.[31] Petronius, in a comment often seen to refer to Lucan, has a character state that a poem on a civil war should not merely present facts in verse, but also include divine machinery (Petron. *Sat.* 118.6).[32] While such statements do or

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[31] Mart. 14.194: *sunt quidam qui me dicant non esse poetam: / sed qui me vendit bybliopola putat* ('There are some who say I [i.e. Lucan] am no poet; but the bookseller who vends me thinks I am', trans. Shackleton Bailey); Servius ad Virg. *A.* 1.382: *Lucanus namque ideo in numero poetarum esse non meruit, quia videtur historiam composuisse, non poema* ('For Lucan therefore does not merit to be among the group of poets because he seems to have composed history, not a poem'); *M. Annaei Lucani Comm. Bern.* ad Luc. 1.1: *ideo (autem) Lucanus dicitur a plerisque non esse in numero poetarum, quia omnino historiam sequitur, quod poeticae arti non convenit* ('Therefore Lucan is said by many not to be in the group of poets because he completely follows history, which does not suit the art of poetry'); Isid. *Etym.* 8.7.10: *unde et Lucanus ideo in numero poetarum non ponitur, quia videtur historias conposuisse, non poema* ('Hence Lucan too is therefore not placed in the group of poets, because he seems to have written histories, not a poem').

[32] Petron. *Sat.* 118.6: *ecce belli civilis ingens opus quisquis attigerit, nisi plenus litteris, sub onere labetur. non enim res gestae versibus comprehendendae sunt, quod longe melius historici faciunt, sed per ambages deorumque ministeria et fabulosum sententiarum tormentum praecipitandus est liber spiritus, ut potius furentis animi vaticinatio appareat quam religiosae orationis sub testibus fides* ('For example, whoever undertakes the great theme of the Civil War, unless he is well versed in literature, will sink under the burden. Historical achievements should not be dealt with in verse, for historians do this far better. Rather it should be the free spirit of genius that plunges headlong through dark metaphors, divine interventions, and the anguish of meaning in legends,

may date from a period after Silius Italicus, they potentially to go back to long-standing discussions or widespread, though unattributable, feelings. Therefore, it can be assumed that Silius Italicus was not only aware of the version of historical epic found in Lucan, but also of the criticism it incurred when he decided to write a historical epic that re-introduces the divine apparatus in the tradition of Naevius, Ennius, and Virgil.[33] As has been pointed out,[34] Silius Italicus thereby marks a clear decision for poetry over historiography and for writing a historical epic in the tradition of Naevius, Ennius and Vergil, which gives the gods a role even in relation to historical events and links historical developments to mythical prehistory.

Livy

The Augustan writer T. Livius, who composed an extensive historiographical work *Ab urbe condita* surveying the history of Rome from its foundation to his own time, obviously does not belong to the Roman epic tradition. Still, Livy's work is relevant for the generic definition of Silius Italicus' poem since there is overlap in the subject matter as the third decade of Livy's historical survey covers the Second Punic War and some similarities show that Silius Italicus engaged with Livy's narrative.[35] Thus, when Silius Italicus presents

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so that it gives the impression of prophetic frenzy rather than the trustworthy accuracy of a solemn account read before witnesses', trans. Schmeling).

[33] See, e.g., Burck 1979, 257–8; Pomeroy 1990, 123; for a discussion of the presentation of the gods in Silius Italicus in relation to Homer, Ennius, and Virgil see Häußler 1978, 187–211.

[34] See Wilson 1993.

[35] See, e.g., Burck 1979, 258–9; Marks 2005, 529–30. For an overview of Silius Italicus' engagement with Livy and the scholarly history of exploring this relation, see Pomeroy 2010; for a discussion of similarities and differences, see Nesselrath 1986, who explains the deviations from Livy not with the use of other sources, but with Silius Italicus' poetic intentions.

material also found in Livy, but differently, such similarities and divergences may demonstrate characteristics of his portrayal of these historical events and show that he is writing in the tradition of Roman historical epic rather than in the style of a historiographical prose work.

For instance, just as the introduction to Livy's third decade (Liv. 21.1), Silius Italicus' proem justifies the focus on the Second Punic War by the mightiness of both forces and the war's ferocity and deadliness, which is said to have brought even the winners close to destruction (Sil. 1.12–16).[36] In Silius Italicus this statement is preceded by an invocation of the Muse (Sil. 1.3), a typical epic feature, while Livy implicitly defines himself as a *rerum scriptor* (Liv. 21.1.1);[37] and in Silius Italicus the introduction leads up to a section looking at the origins of the war on a historical, mythical and divine level (Sil. 1.21–139). Thus, from the start Silius Italicus goes beyond a pure historical report and aligns himself with Naevius, Ennius, and Virgil by relating the causes of the war to Juno's anger at Aeneas relocating from Troy to Italy and her wish to protect the city founded by Dido. Juno's prominent role at an early stage also sets off this poem from the epic style of Lucan and demonstrates that in the imperial period it is still possible to write about historical developments in traditional epic form.

That the events are to be presented in epic format in order to highlight characteristics of the protagonists or themes of the narrative is also obvious from scenes added to the historical

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[36] For a comparison, see, e.g., von Albrecht 1964, 16–24; Pomeroy 1990, 124–6; Marks 2005, 531.

[37] When Ennius says '*latos <per> populos res atque poemata nostra / <… clara> cluebunt* ('widely among the peoples will our subject and our poetry be brilliantly celebrated'; trans. Goldberg) in the first book of the *Annales*, *res* is applied to the content of the work; but it seems to indicate the content complementing the form (*poemata*) and does not necessarily highlight the historical nature of the material.

record: for instance, with an allusion to Hercules at the crossroads, Scipio is shown to be prompted to go to Spain and fight after the appearance of Virtue and Pleasure (Sil. 15.18–128); in another scene Scipio summons the dead in a nekyia and receives a prophecy of his own future and that of Rome (Sil. 13.395–895); the sad effects of war are indicated, for instance, by the story of a father who takes the arms from his dead son on the battlefield without recognizing him and is then killed by his other son in a case of mistaken identity, which is realized just before the father's death, upon which the other son kills himself (Sil. 9.66–177). Throughout the epic there are vignettes such as the horse of Cloelius showing sadness and support at his master's death like a human being (Sil. 10.458–471).

Conclusion

Not unexpectedly, this paradigmatic survey of features linking Silius Italicus' poem with earlier works of Roman writers belonging to the same literary subgenre of historical epic and the consideration of contrasts with historiography show that the well-read Silius Italicus is familiar with these texts and engages with them for his own epic. He thus produces what has been called 'implicit literary history'.[38] In line with this tradition, adapting and adopting elements creatively, he combines the narration of an event from the past with the mythical and poetic presentation of historical developments.[39]

The question remains to what extent such a shape might characterize the *Punica* as a 'typical Roman historical epic'. As indicated, resolving this issue is connected with an

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[38] See von Albrecht 2011, 101.

[39] It has been suggested that the result could be described as having both classical and modern features (Schubert 2010).

appropriate definition of 'Roman historical epic'.[40] The genre of narrative epic can be distinguished from other literary genres by mere formal criteria, such as metrical form, language and the use of particular type scenes, but these formal elements are shared between mythical and historical epics. The difference between the two varieties should consist in the subject matter; yet the boundaries can be blurred as Virgil's *Aeneid* indicates; thus, the style in which and the perspective from which the events are narrated is also an important factor. What is common to all Roman historical epics (defined by content) is a focus not only on the individual historical event or period forming the main subject matter or plot, but also on its role in the development of the whole of Roman history and its significance as a statement on Roman national character, its key characteristics or Rome's destined role in the world, which then again distinguishes these epics from historiography. Silius Italicus shapes his poem along these lines, picking up elements from earlier epics, such as flashback and foreshadowing to include a larger historical dimension or the elaboration of the narrative by epic type scenes.

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[40] Such a description for Silius Italicus is questioned by Wilson 1993, 218–19: 'History is, as it were, mythologized, wrenched not just in language but in event into the epic mode. The epic imagination is everywhere victorious over historical probability. History is there only to be transmuted. … On his retirement he might have seemed well placed to take up the writing of history. Instead he preferred to defy it. Re-appropriating from prose historiography the story of the most significant foreign war fought by the Roman nation, he restored it to poetry, its original home. … In Silius' hands epic narrative offers an alternative to prose historiographical narrative as a vehicle for drawing out the significance of past events, one which imports a radically different (if archaic) cultural ideology: different concepts of time, of causality, of human psychology and human identity. The *Pharsalia* and the *Punica* cannot be classed together. The former is a compromise, a historical epic. Silius' epic is uncompromisingly anti-historical.'

Silius Italicus takes up and modifies individual elements from preceding Roman historical epics (e.g., combination of historical and mythical elements and of different time periods; addition of mythical and poetic features to historical events; inclusion of indirect statements about contemporary situation) and aligns with the Republican and early imperial tradition against versions such as Lucan's poem. While the fusion of historical and mythical elements and the presentation of history in epic style might increase the gulf between such a work and proper historiography (despite potential recourse to the same sources), at the same time such a combination demonstrates that the resulting work is meant to be marked as a 'historical epic'. By continuing the tradition and choosing subject matter consisting of an event from the Republican past, involving the participation of the Roman people and many different individuals, Silius Italicus maintains the established format of Roman epic. It has been pointed out that this approach is anachronistic and does not achieve a reconnection of epic and history in a sustainable way;[41] yet, it shows creative engagement with the tradition, applied to an event that may be presented in a meaningful way for his own period. If, what is put in the mouth of the character Scipio can be applied to the poet, writing about Roman history in the style of Homer (and thus especially Ennius and also Virgil) is an ideal for Silius Italicus.[42]

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[41] See Marks 2010a.

[42] Sil. 13.792–7: *Scipio perlustrans oculis laetantibus umbram* / *'si nunc fata darent, ut Romula facta per orbem* / *hic caneret vates, quanto maiora futuros* / *facta eadem intrarent hoc' inquit 'teste nepotes!* / *felix Aeacide, cui tali contigit ore* / *gentibus ostendi! crevit tua carmine virtus'* ('Scipio gazed with joyful eyes at the ghost of Homer and said: "If Fate would suffer this poet now to sing of Roman achievements, for all the world to hear, how much deeper an impression the same deeds would make upon posterity, if Homer testified to them! How fortunate was Achilles, when such a poet displayed him to the world! The hero was made greater by the poet's verse"', trans. Duff).

Thus, it turns out that Silius Italicus' poem can be regarded as a typical Roman historical epic by the choice of subject matter and the depiction of the material, but that the work also displays its own ways of showcasing the historical events and their implications in line with its particular focus and the circumstances of the poet's time.[43] This again seems to be a unifying feature among Roman historical epics. Therefore, Silius Italicus, as a late and reflective poet, demonstrates the core features and the flexibility of the subgenre of Roman historical epic, even though he did not manage to encourage others to follow in his vein in the immediate chronological context.

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[43] This aspect of Silius Italicus' epic is thus an example of the double-sided attitude to the literary tradition Barchiesi (2001, 317) has observed in Flavian epic: 'Il mio tema conduttore è la duplicità del loro rapporto con il passato letterario: la continua ricostruzione di un'epica 'pura', canonica, in qualche caso persino eccessiva, ma autocosciente di esserlo, e la ricorrente tentazione di una tradizione 'altra', che potrebbe sovvertire, ma anche arricchire e variare, la poetica dell'epos'.

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