Classica Cracoviensia
vol. XXII (2019), pp. 91–118
https://doi.org/10.12797/CC.20.2019.22.04

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THE POETIC STRUCTURE OF SILIUS ITALICUS' *PUNICA* (BOOKS I–V)

ABSTRACT: As concerns their poetic structure, the first five books of Silius' *Punica* are very differentiated and complicated. However, all the events of the represented world concentrate around Hannibal and his *improba virtus*. Historical and mythological ekphrases are connected with Hannibal's deeds. Aetiological stories seem to be invented by Silius himself. The panegyrical elements refer mainly to Domitian. Prolepses especially deserve to be noticed. Silius is influenced by learned Hellenistic poets, as well as Roman authors, mainly Ennius, Vergil, Lucan, Valerius Flaccus. In fact the author of the *Punica* can be described as *poeta doctus*.

KEY WORDS: *improba virtus*, epics, prolepsis, ekphrasis, aetiology, panegyric

In the beginning I shall present the aim of this paper. I shall mainly analyse the portrait of Hannibal, ekphrases, aetiological stories, panegyrics, prolepses to demonstrate their function and purpose in the poetic structure of the epos. What is the poetic structure? In my opinion, the poetic structure consists of these elements which let the reader invent and understand the main idea of the epos. The narrator propones his own vision of the Second Punic War to the reader and tries to persuade them. I think that this problem is very important and a new one in studies on Silius' epos.[1] I shall commence the analysis of the most important

[1] Bibliography to this research is rather modest. Scholars, even if they investigate Silius' *Punica*, do not spend much time to solve this problem, e.g. Kissel 1979; Ahl,

elements in the poetic structure of Silius Italicus' epos *Punica*[2] with the varied descriptions of Hannibal who is the leading protagonist in the first five books of the poem. These books undoubtedly constitute a certain complete whole, encapsulating the initial phase of the Second Punic War from the siege and conquest of Saguntum till the battle on the shores of Lake Trasimene. This is the first out of three parts that form this great epos. It should be noted that in Silius' *Punica* the mythological motifs are closely linked with the historical ones. It's a distinguishing characteristic of this poem. The name of the great Carthaginian appears for the first time in verse 39 of Book I. The narrator says that the belligerent (*belliger*) Hannibal[3] flushed with anger incited by the goddess Juno: she dared to oppose this sole man against the workings of fate (*componere fatis*). In verses 56–69 the narrator, directly characterising the Carthaginian commander, uses vocabulary more easily found in historiography than in epic poetry. The reader's attention is drawn in particular to the antihuman traits of the Carthaginian. Eager for war and prone to break his oath of allegiance (*fidei sinister*),[4] with cunning (*astu*) as his distinguishing feature, he was a stranger to any sense of justice. The narrator emphasises that when Hannibal was armed he did not show any veneration for the gods, his valour was vile (*improba virtus*) and his heart was consumed with blood lust.[5] While in his prime, he desired to obliterate

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Davis, Pomeroy 1986; Fucecchi 1990; Ariemma 2000; Boyle, Dominik 2003; Tipping 2010a.

[2] The text of Silius' *Punica* I use is based on the edition *Sili Italici Punica*, ed. Ludovicus Bauer, vol. prius libros I–X continens, Lipsiae MDCCCXC; vol. alterum libros XI–XVII continens, Lipsiae MDCCCCXII. This edition is still the most valuable.

[3] There are numerous epithets describing Hannibal strewn throughout the whole poem, i.e. *Afer* (IV 722), *Agenoreus* (III 631), *Barcaeus* (X 354), *Belides* (III 650), *Elissaeus* (II 239), *Libys* (VII 132; VII 241; VII 526), *Libycus* (VII 401; XV 362; V 203), *Nomas* (XI 31), *Poenus* (I 515), *Sidonius* (VII 98), *Sidonius ductor* (I 296-297; III 406; IV 324–325; V 2), *Tyrius* (XV 433). Cf. von Albrecht 1964: 54; Vessey 1982: 320–335; Dominik 2003: 472; Ganiban 2010: 73–98.

[4] Cf. Sallust. *Cat.* 5, 4–5: *animus audax subdolus varius, quoius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni adpetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. vastus animus inmoderata incredibilia nimis alta semper cupiebat* (a portrait of Catiline).

[5] Cf. Liv. XXI 4, 9: *inhumana crudelitas, perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus deum metus, nullum ius iurandum, nulla religio*. Cf. Spentzou 2008: 143.

the defeat in the battle of the Aegates from human memory, a blemish on the reputation of his ancestors (*dedecus*), and to "sink" the peace treaty in the Sicilian Sea.[6] Another longer assessment of Hannibal can be found in verses 239–270. Surprisingly and seemingly in juxtaposition to the earlier description, the narrator points out the extraordinary, almost superhuman features of the Carthaginian's character. He was full of energy, whenever it was inciting him to glory; against nature he denied himself sleep and spent the nights vigilant and armed. He challenged the fates and was ready to break his faith with the Romans; he rejoiced that he waged war on Rome and brought his attack on the Capitoline Hill from the outer limits of the world. A direct characterization is present as well in Book II, verses 25–35. Hannibal hollers at the Roman envoys that at the moment they defend foreign territory (namely Saguntum),[7] but soon they will fear for the future of their own gates and hearths:

> *... portisque focisque timebis,*
> *Quae nunc externos defendis, Roma, penatis* (v. 31–32).

Woe betide blind minds and haughty hearts, emboldened by the favour of the fates! These words are tragically poignant. A bit further on, in verses 44–53, we read the direct speech of the Carthaginian directed to his companions. He is full of irony, saying that they should quickly call the Ausonian ship from the seas. He is ready to be bound and delivered for torture. Let the Rhoetean rule eternally and ferociously (*ferox*)[8]

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[6] Cf. Sallust. *Cat.* 10, 1: *Carthago aemula imperi Romani*.

[7] I believe that the conquest of Saguntum can be treated as a foretelling (prolepsis) of the eventual conquest and sack of Rome. Cf. III 564: *casus metuit iam Roma Sagunti*.

[8] *Ferox* is one of the distinctive features of the epic poem. It appears at the very beginning (I 2–3): *ferox Carthago*. This epithet is often encountered among the Roman authors, e.g. Liv. I 46, 6; XXI 20, 8; III 70, 10; XXII 3, 4: *consul ferox ab consulatu priore et non modo legum aut patrum maiestatis sed ne deorum quidem satis metuens*; Sallust. *Cat.* 5, 7; 11, 5; 38, 1; *Hist.* II 39; Verg. *Aen.* XII 19; Hor. *Carm.* IV 9, 21; Ovid. *Met.* XI 323; Stat. *Silv.* IV 6, 97. *Ferocia* is also noteworthy e.g. Liv. XXV 18, 2; XXXV 49, 2; Sallust. *Cat.* 61, 4; *Hist.* II 87 B; Tac. *Hist.* IV 19; Vell. II 115, 4. In Silius' work an important place is also reserved for Hasdrubal's *feritas* (I 148): *... immedicabilis ira, / Et fructus regni feritas erat; asper amore / Sanguinis, et metui demens credebat honorem* (I 147–149) and similarly for the Concan's (III 360).

spread his power over other nations. The Carthaginians should quake in fear at his every command or nod.

An indirect characterization of Hannibal can be found in multiple passages. The narrator uses a distinct manner, founded on solid arguments, while accentuating the position of Hannon who came from a family that was particularly opposed to Hannibal (II 276–326). Hannon's speech is full of argumentation typical for advisory orations. Hannon warns the Carthaginians that they should not keep this tool of perdition (*exitiale caput*[9]), otherwise named Hannibal in their camp and in their war. He recognises in him an inborn poison and hereditary pride (*ingenitum virus flatusque paternos*). The young man is haunted by the restless spirit of his dead father and by inauspicious sacrifices, he is persecuted by the gods who turned against the peace breaker. Hannon poses a rhetorical question whether Hannibal is not seeking his own glory through destroying his homeland. The arguments used by Hannon are of a decidedly pro-Roman nature. He is verily an apologist of Roman values, both political and moral. He attempts to prove that Roman forces will not be exhausted by either iron or fire. Young soldiers mature in the military camps while the veterans who often shed their blood during the long service in the army stand now in the first rows and challenge death. Hannon believes that Carthage can be saved from the terrible loss of blood if she denounces war and does not run the unnecessary danger of retribution from the victors.[10]

The ideological significance of the several final verses in the second book of the poem (v. 696–707) cannot be underestimated. The narrator here juxtaposes the spirits of the pious inhabitants of Saguntum,[11] destroyed by the unjust decree of the gods, and the suicidal spirit of

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9 Cf. Liv. XXI 10, 11. According to Hannon Hannibal is *furia et fax huius belli*.

10 I shall recall here the unusually long review of Hannibal's army. The commander has looked at the shining war signs as far as his sight could reach and marched, leaving a shadow on the road he triumphantly walked (III 231–414).

11 Cf. Luc. III 349–350 (the inhabitants of Massilia are likened to those of Saguntum). Silius emphasizes above everything else the love of freedom and glory inherited after the ancestors (I 294–295): *Libertas populis pacto servata decusque / Maiorum, et Poenis urbi imperitare negatum*.

Hannibal.[12] Expelled from his homeland he will wander across the whole world, while the terrified Carthage will witness his desperate flight. The once invincible warrior will arrive at the waters of Styx disfigured and blue after taking poison (*liventi veneno*). One can say that the former victor will be humiliated and, as I suppose, perhaps even pitiable.[13] I believe that the narrator feels here a certain amount of compassion for Hannibal.

In Gades, in the temple of Hercules (*clavigerum numen*) the Carthaginian requests something from his young son, calling him the hope of noble Carthage and efficient scourge of the Aeneads (III 4–124). He entreats him to become more powerful than his father and to attain glory by accomplishing deeds far greater than those of his progenitor. Let him pose his infantile hands on the altars of Elissa and swear on his father's ashes that he will fight against Rome.[14] In a more mature age he shall trample on the treaty and plunge into the heat of battle, emerging as victor to claim the Capitoline Hill as his father's grave. Men need to face the labours (*labor*[15]) which once exhausted Alcides and astonished his stepmother. They need to challenge the Alps, a feat more difficult than mere war. Hannibal's wife, Imilce, claims that no success, no matter how great, will ever satisfy his valour. The Carthaginian's glory varies from the one of an ordinary man; it knows no bounds. Hannibal believes that death in the time of peace is dishonourable for a warrior. He uses ultimate arguments and says that he is haunted by the spirits of the dead, that he sees before his eyes the altars and the terrifying victims while the brief and changeable time does not allow him to postpone the war. Should he throw away the honours out of fear of death? A life doomed to be forgotten is not that different from death! In conclusion, it seems Hannibal's arguments are of a largely existential nature.

I shall now look more closely at the unusual dream experienced by Hannibal (III 165–216**)**. The narrator emphasises that Jove, thinking about making the Trojan people famous through cruel wars, hastened Hannibal's plans and appeared to him in a dream, reproaching the

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12 Silius, following in the footsteps of other Roman authors, such as Livy, justifies the lack of Roman military assistance for Saguntum laying the blame on the unjust stance of the gods.

13 This is an unequivocal example of *tyches metabole*.

14 The schema of Hannibal's childhood oath is repeated.

15 *Labor* is a dominant theme in Book III of *Punica*. Cf. Asso 2010: 179–192.

Carthaginian for idleness (*segnis quies*) and incapability of undertaking audacious actions.[16] The god added emphatically he would be able to help Hannibal so that he could stand as a victor beneath the lofty walls of Rome.

The fear of Hannibal is ubiquitous. Bostar, returning from the oracle of Jove Hammon in Africa, brings back a prophecy on the fates of the war. The priest foretold that Hannibal will multiply the glory of the Carthaginian ancestors and that no other man will ever be able to invade further the territory of the Ausonian people. The tribe of Saturn will not be free of fear until Hannibal breathes his last (III 707–712).[17]

Naturally, the essential passages are those referring directly to the military achievements of the great Carthaginian. I shall point out the most important fragments in the poem. After crossing the Alps Hannibal, in his speech to the Carthaginian soldiers, reminded them that they conquered all the distant lands of Iberia, subjugated Pyrenees and Rhône, burnt to ashes the Rutulian Saguntum[18] and forced the Celts to give them passage through their land (IV 61–80).

Before the battle on the shores of Lake Trasimene Juno addresses Hannibal, telling him that if Fortune made him a Roman, he would have joined the ranks of the highest gods. Why does he stop the flow of destiny? He should make haste as the favour of Fortune is transient.[19] The

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16 A comparison with Aeneas urged by Mercury to take a more decisive action, see Verg. *Aen.* IV 560–570.

17 Perhaps Silius treats Hannibal as an agent of destiny who is supposed to make the Romans fulfil their civilizational mission. In this light he could be seen as a Punic Aeneas or even Cornelius Scipio. Cf. von Albrecht 1964: 177; Vessey 1974: 28; Klaassen 2010: 100; Vessey 1975: 401: "Aeneas founded Rome; but he also engendered Hannibal, who attempts, like a ghastly parody or hellish Doppelgänger of Aeneas, to conquer Italy and to subject it to Carthage".

18 *Rutuli* within Silius' poem represent either the citizens of Saguntum (II 567; I 584; II 541) or the Romans (XIII 163; XIII 171; XV 759; XVII 125; XVI 141; IX 507; X 449; V 403; XV 642; XV 737; XI 165; III 261).

19 This is an example of a *sententia*, one of many. *Fortuna* appears frequently on the pages of *Punica*, e.g.: I 8; III 93; IV 38; IV 57; IV 730; V 93; V 265; VI 368; VII 245; VII 387; IX 157; IX 162; IX 328; IX 354; IX 409; X 574; XI 39; XI 168; XII 554; XIII 265; XIII 383; XV 640; XV 736; XVI 29; XVI 616; VII 99; IX 48; IV 448; VII 93; VIII 365; X 215; VII 10; VIII 316; XII 62; IV 607; IX 162; XI 4. Cf. Liv. XXX 30, 5: *hoc quoque ludibrium casus ediderit fortuna*; XLIV 40, 3: *neutro imperatorum volente fortuna, quae plus consiliis humanis pollet, contraxit certamen*.

rivers of blood that he promised his father while swearing an oath to be the enemy of Rome will now flow from the body of Italy and his father's spirit will feast on slaughter (IV 727–735). The imagery is remarkably graphic and cruel, similar to the one employed by Lucan in his *Pharsalia*.

The narrator emphasises (reported speech) that according to Hannibal, no danger is too high a cost when it comes to the desire of waging a war. The Carthaginian believes that he would have seen enough if he could advance in a victorious march on the Capitoline Hill and attack the Italian enemy at close quarters (IV 756–759).

Another speech, this time direct, can be found in Book IV 808–817, at the moment when Hannibal learns that Hannon wants to sacrifice his young son to the gods. In a solemn apostrophe to the personified mother Carthage the Carthaginian says she placed him on a level equal to the gods and he does not know how to ever thank her for this generosity. He announces that he will fight day and night so as to send many nobly born of the Quirinus' nation as sacrificial victims to the temples of Carthage. His son is the only hope (*spes*) he has and the sole guardian of Tyrian power in the face of the threat posed by Italy. He should remember to fight the Aeneads on land and sea throughout his whole life.

The military achievements of Hannibal during the battle on the shores of Lake Trasimene are particularly noteworthy. While killing Viriasius, Hannibal exclaimed that he was worthy to die of his hand. Yet, if he were not born out of Italian land, he would allow him to keep his life (V 561–564). The veteran Labicus met a similar fate. The commander of the Carthaginians shouted out that Labicus would pay there and then for his participation in the first battle and that the famous Hamilcar was sending him with his right hand to the land of the dead (V 573–576).[20] After winning the final victory in this battle Hannibal pointed out to Mago the outstanding bravery of the Romans. He showed him how every hand was gripping a sword and how an armed soldier, even in his death, still kept

[20] Cf. IV 181–185: the narrator laments the fate Tullus met saying that he would have been a great credit to Ausonia and would have brought his country remarkable glory, if only the fates gave him longer life or if Carthage did not break the peace treaty; IV 239–242: Batus, in a rage, fought with Scipio's horse and protected himself with a shield against his attack, but the steed managed to kick him and he fell in the rusty-red sand, where his face caved in under the hoofs.

his place in the battle formation (*armatusque iacet servans certamina miles*). The fronts of the fallen are still savagely creased and their faces express anger. Moreover, Hannibal fears that the land who gave birth to such brave men is destined to rule the world, even if it is defeated on the battlefield (V 669–676):

> *Et vereor, ne, quae tanta creat indole tellus*
> *Magnanimos fecunda viros, huic fata dicarint*
> *Imperium, atque ipsis devincat cladibus orbem* (v. 674–676).

Silius seems to express his belief that the Roman *virtus* will overcome all failures and will eventually bring about the defeat of the Carthaginians.

Another important means of poetical expression used to describe Hannibal and his achievements is ekphrasis.[21] In Book II, verses 406–456, we read that Hannibal receives as a gift from the peoples inhabiting the shores of the Atlantic Ocean an armour made of bronze and hard iron and covered in the gold of Tagus. The narrator uses here a principle of retrospection. Hannibal joyfully inspects every detail of the armour as he recognizes in the decoration a picture of how the kingdom of Carthage came to be. One of the most crucial elements of this poetical ekphrasis is a head of a battle horse, dug from the earth, which was treated by the Carthaginians as an auspicious omen.[22] Amidst the scenes one can perceive the tragic history of Aeneas and Dido. In another part of the shield there is Hannibal, praying at the altars of chthonic gods and, with the help of a Stygian priestess, making a secret bloody libation and swearing to fight the Aeneads from his earliest years. The left side of the shield is filled with inlaid images of Spartan warriors. Near them Regulus hangs from a cross, noble in his suffering. Nearby another, more joyous (one could almost say idyllic) scene can be seen: herds of wild animals pursued by hunters and African huts. It is best to keep in mind that idyllic elements are a rarity in epic poetry, giving way to scenes full of violence and unrestrained cruelty.

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21 Cf. Harrison 2010: 279–292; Manuwald 2009: 38–59.

22 Perhaps this way the narrator wants to highlight the military successes of Carthage. *Bellator equus* is, I believe, a symbol of valour.

I shall pass to the analysis of subsequent ekphrases. In the beginning of Book III we read (v. 32–44) that on the doors of Hercules' temple his labours (*labor*) were engraved. Among them there was the Lernaean hydra, the Nemean lion, the Stygian guardian, Megaera, Thracian horses, the Erymanthian scourge etc. A special place though, I think, is reserved for the fires of Oeta, devoted to the gods:[23] great flames take the hero's soul to the stars, foreshadowing his apotheosis. The narrator emphasises that for Hannibal this is a sort of lesson in various kinds of valour (*varia virtutis imago*). From my side I would like to add that what we have here is undoubtedly a proleptic passage, predicting the military feats of the great Carthaginian in the nearest future. I shall describe here another example, this time from Book I, v. 617–629. The holy doorframes and doorstep of the temple in Laurentum have been decorated with captured chariots, honourable spoils of war, arms taken from the enemy commanders, axes, cruel in battle, pierced shields etc. One can see as well wars with Carthage, the Aegadian Islands and bows of ships bearing witness that Libya[24] (i.e. Africa) has been chased from the sea after the defeat of her fleet. There are helms of the Senones and the traitorous sword (*improbus ensis*), which defined the weight of disbursed gold, as well as the arms borne during the festive procession after the return of Camillus, when the Gauls were forced to flee the citadel. There are as well the spoils of Aeacus' descendant (i.e. Pyrrhus), Epirotian banners, bristling plumes of Ligurian helmets, primitive shields taken from Spanish tribes and Alpine javelins. Thus this ekphrasis has a purely historical, not mythological, character and its purpose is both retrospective and didactic. It could be called a lesson, demonstrating military achievements of the Romans.

In Book II, v. 153–159, Theron wears on his head a skin stripped from a lion and on his shield a hundred snakes and a monster of Lerna, the hydra that duplicated itself whenever her snakes were cut. Finally, in Book IV, v. 150–156, Crixus, proud of his ancestors, claims descent from Brennus and feels that taking of the Capitoline Hill entitles him to fame. The mad man, as the narrator calls him, depicted the Celts weighing gold

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[23] Cf. Ovid. *Met.* IX 165: *inplevitque* [Hercules] *suis nemorosum vocibus Oeten*; Cic. *Tusc.* II 19: *Herculem in Oeta magnitudine dolorum eiulantem*; Luc. III 178.

[24] Silius uses metonymy multiple times.

on the top of the Tarpeian rock on his shield. His snow-white nape is adorned with a shiny golden necklace, his robes bear golden stripes, his gauntlets are stiff with gold and his plume sparkles with the same colour. Let me note here that we encounter here a rare thing in Silius' poetry, i.e. description of colours.

It is difficult to imagine an epic poem without prophetic signs (*omina*). In Silius they take the place of pride as well.[25] In Book II, v. 584–595, in besieged Saguntum a snake (*anguis*) comes out of the base of a mound. Its body is blue, tinged with green and peppered with golden spots. Its eyes are flaming red. It meanders amid terrified groups of people in the middle of the city and quickly slithers down the lofty walls. Then, as if it were escaping, it heads for the nearest shore and quickly plunges into the waves of the foaming sea.[26] The narrator says this is the moment when the hearts of the people quake: it seems to them that the dead have abandoned their endangered graves and that their spirits do not agree to rest in a conquered land. The hope of salvation brings nothing but disgust, they abstain from food, seized by a masked Erinys (*abdita Erinnys*). I believe that the narrator wishes here to bring the reader's attention once again to the madness of the Saguntians, caused by the injustice of the gods.

A black serpent (*serpens*) appears as well in Hannibal's dream. In Book III, v. 183–218, grasping with its enormous coils trees uprooted in the mountains and dragging them through inaccessible rocks, hisses and threatens with mortal venom. Immense as the Serpent that wraps its coils around the Great and Little Bear and encompasses both constellations on its way. Rage of the bursting heavens adds to the noise and provokes a vehement downpour mixed with hail. Hannibal asks the god Mercury who this terrible monster is, whether its coils are destined to torture the earth and which nations he will devour with his gawping maw. The god replies that the snake is a symbol of the coming war.[27] In Hannibal's

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[25] Cf. VIII 622–655; esp. 626–631: *Per sudum attonitis pila exarsere maniplis, / Et celsae toto ceciderunt aggere pinnae, / Nutantique ruens prostravit vertice silvas / Garganus, fundoque imo fugivit anhelans / Aufidus, et magno late distantia ponto / Terruerunt pavidos accensa Ceraunia nautas*.

[26] Cf. Stat. *Theb.* V 505–533.

[27] Cf. II 547; III 191; III 301; III 427. In Book III 314–316 the narrator recollects a short *aition*. Rumour (*Fama*) says that when Perseus killed Gorgon and absconded with

footsteps there thread great wars, destroyed forests, furious storms on stormy sky, the massacre of warriors and the sorrowful annihilation of the people of Ida. As the serpent laid waste to the mountains with scaly coils, scattered the uprooted trees among the fields and wetted the whole earth with its foaming venom, so the mighty Hannibal will run down from the subjugated Alps and cover Italy with a black cloud of war. Hannibal, joyous, yet also fearful, ponders the promises brought by the dream and rethinks again that whole night. Soon he pays homage to the ruler of the heavens and Mars, in thanks for the auspicious omens.

Sometimes a god speaks through the lips of his medium.[28] In Book III, v. 700–712, in the Oracle of Hammon in Africa a priest gives Bostar a prophecy saying that Carthaginians are heading for Latium and prepare to wage war on the descendants of Assaracus. His words are full of bloody metaphors. The medium sees how the cruel Gradivus ascends a war chariot, the raging steeds breathe forth flame against Hesperia, and the blood streams down heavily from the reins. The one who seeks to know the outcome of battles and the final verdict of the fates should invade the Iapygian plane of the Aetolian leader. He will multiply the glory of his Carthaginian ancestors and no man after him shall be able to pierce more deeply the interior of the Ausonian people.[29] The race of Saturn will not be free of fear until Hannibal draws his last breath.

Before the battle of Ticinus a sign appeared on a cloudless sky. A hawk, flying from the direction of the sun and heading south, suddenly attacked a flock of pigeons, the beloved birds of Venus. It savagely wounded and murdered fifteen victims. It assaulted fiercely a dove which, terrified by the annihilation of the other birds, trembled in the air with a flapping wing. Finally an eagle, Jove's bird, flying from the east forced the hawk to escape towards the thin clouds. Then the victorious

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her head, the dread blood wetted (*dirum fluxisse cruorem*) Libyan soil. Since then the land has been full of Medusa's venomous snakes.

[28] Cf. Verg. *Aen.* VI 77–97 (Cumaean Sibyl) – cf. Austin 1977: 66–68; Luc. V 161–197 (Pythia).

[29] State is often treated by Silius as an organic creature. In Livy (II 1, 1–6) it is worth to note the imagery of organic growth: the society ripens in the way grain or fruit does (see expressions such as *laetior*, *immaturae*, *serere*, *nondum adultae*, *fovit*, *nutriendo*, *bonam frugem ferre*). See also Polyb. *Hist.* VI 9, 10–13; VI 51, 4; Cass. Hemina, frg. 24, Peter; Lucr. II 1131–1132.

dove turned back and joyfully flew towards the Roman signs and the place where the son of the leader, Scipio, swung his shiny sword, full of childish energy.[30]

The list of prophetic signs preceding the battle on the shores of Lake Trasimene is particularly long. In Book V, v. 59–76, the narrator says that according to an ancient custom the people of Latium seek the advice of birds when they prepare for war and thus study the will of gods regarding the outcome of a military struggle.[31] In this case, the birds refused to eat, as if they were aware of the imminent despair:

Tunc ales, priscum populis de more Latinis
Auspicium, cum bella parant mentesque deorum
Explorant super eventu, ceu praescia luctus,
Damnavit vesci planctuque alimenta refugit (v. 59–62).

The sacrificial bull also did not stop to bellow in a mournful and hoarse voice and when the axe hung above its neck it shrank and ran away from the altar. When they attempted to pull the military signs from the heaped earth foully smelling blood burst from cracked soil straight into their faces, as Mother Earth herself sent them from her wounded breast the terrible portents of future destruction. Moreover, the father of the gods, who shakes both land and sea with his thunders, snatched the missiles from the forge of the Cyclopes and threw them into the waters of Lake Trasimene. Yet all the portents and signs that are supposed to stop the Fate are futile, the narrator adds. Even gods cannot go against it:

Heu vani monitus frustraque morantia Parcas
Prodigia! heu fatis superi certare minores! (v. 75–76)

The descendants of Aeneas (V 188–207) will mourn what followed for many centuries. The bugles simultaneously gave a sinister call and the trumpet pierced the air with terrible thrill. Gods turned their faces and unwillingly ceded their place to the mightier Fate.[32]

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30 Silius mentions the unusual energy of young Scipio multiple times.

31 Cf. VIII 634: *Obseditque frequens castrorum limina bubo*.

32 Cf. V 225–228: fervour of the Romans was kindled in consequence of their defeat and despair proved to be a strong incentive in their blackest hour. The enemies were

I shall now focus on the cult of the gods (*cultus deorum*) and discuss several important examples. In Book II, v. 484–492, Hercules asks the goddess Fides for help. In reported speech he calls her older than Jove, believes her to be the glory of gods and people as well as the silent divinity in the depths of human heart. He poses a rhetorical question whether she can gaze at the sinister destruction of Saguntum and calmly observe the city that suffered so much in her defence. She is the reason why simple people die, she is called upon by disheartened men, her name is on the lips of the youngest, uttering their first words. The goddess replies using arguments of a legal and ethical nature (v. 494–512). She says she fully understands Hercules' reasoning and she believes breaking a peace treaty is a great crime. She has already picked a day when she will punish these horrible misdeeds.[33] She deserted vicious kings who equally frighten others and are afraid themselves, seized by gold lust and seduced by bountiful reward for frauds. She also withdrew herself from the people who inspire fear with their manners and live from robbery like wild animals. Great honour (*decus*) is lessened through luxury while the sense of shame (*pudor*) is immersed in impenetrable darkness. Violence is venerated, sword seeks the place reserved for the law and valour cedes before crime (*probris cessit virtus*). All the nations are guilty. Only their mutual sense of guilt closely guards the peace. Yet if she desires to have the walls built by her hand so that she can preserve the valour worthy of her by remembering the end and so that the exhausted people do not surrender to the Carthaginians, then the goddess will grant them the only gift the Fate and the sequence of future events allows her to give. She will prolong the glory of their death and pass it on to future generations. She will accompany herself to their praiseworthy spirits on their way towards the nether world. We should note here that the argumentation of the goddess is particularly hypocritical and self-contradictory.[34]

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encouraged by the kindness of heavens and merry face of the goddess Victory; they enjoyed as well the favour of Mars. We should note that this time the gods are hostile not only to the inhabitants of Saguntum but also to the Romans. Livy's account (XXII 1, 8–12; 17-18) is horrifying and richly filled with "tragic" rhetoric. Cf. Plin. *Nat. hist*. III 20: *Saguntum* […] *oppidum fide nobile*.

33 Cf. Catull. XXX 11: *at di meminerunt, meminit Fides*.

34 From this it can be concluded that goddess Fides bears the full responsibility for the annihilation of Saguntum. Silius once again exculpates the Romans. Such a solution

In the Battle of the Trebia consul Scipio prays to his native gods (reported speech), whose benevolence allowed the Dardanian[35] Rome to endure, asking whether they have recently spared his life in a cruel battle only to make him perish in such a vile way. Is he not worthy to die at the hand of a brave soldier? Let him be allowed to die on a battlefield so that he can gain respect in the eyes of his country and brother (IV 670–675). In Book III, v. 559–569, Venus asks Jove what shall be the end of punishment and the limit of destruction for the Aeneads.[36] When will he grant them a permanent abode after such long wandering across the lands and seas? Why the Carthaginian attempts to banish her descendants from the city that Jove himself had once granted her? He put the Alps under the power of Libya and he threatens to end the Roman rule. Rome fears the fate of Saguntum as she speaks. She begs the father to grant them a resting place, so that they could finally lay down the ashes and holy relics of the fallen Troy, as well as Assaracus' lares and Vesta's mysteries, i.e. the

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is particularly surprising as Fides was greatly venerated in Rome, as can be seen in the poetry of Ennius (cf. *Scen*. 403) and speeches of Cato (cf. Cic. *Off.* III 104: *Nam praeclare Ennius: O Fides alma apta pinnis et ius iurandum Iovis! Qui ius igitur iurandum violat, is Fidem violat, quam in Capitolio "vicinam Iovis optimi maximi", ut in Catonis oratione est, maiores nostri esse voluerunt*). The scholars agree that the cult of Fides was truly ancient. In antiquity, tradition unhesitatingly linked the beginnings of the cult with the great founder of religious law, Numa Pompilius (e.g. Liv. I 21, 4; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II 75, 2; Plut. *Numa* 16; Flor. I 2; Cic. *Nat. Deor.* II 61). The credibility of the Roman people, a symbol of which was their reverence for the goddess Fides, is reflected in the treaties and agreements they concluded with other nations. Among the numerous reasons for the affluence of Saguntum, such as the richness of the sea and the land or significant population growth, Livy indicates their "holiness" in respecting the rules, which made them keep their oaths faithfully (*fides socialis*) until the very end (XXI 7, 3). This issue is treated in a similar way by the envoys of Saguntum who speak in the Roman senate. Their speech is a characteristic *locus classicus* of all the allies suffering due to their *fides* towards Rome: *nihil ultra malorum est, patres conscripti, quam quod passi sumus, ut ad ultimum fidem vobis praestaremus* (XXVIII 39, 1). The Roman senators declare that both the destruction of Saguntum and its reconstruction will be a testimony of the mutual keeping of faith by both sides (XXVIII 39, 17).

[35] The adjective *Dardanus, -a, -um* is quite frequent in Silius in various contexts, e.g. *bella* (IV 733); *ductor* (I 14); *proelia* (V 291); *puppis* (II 1); *regna* (III 710); *Roma* (IV 670); *signa* (III 616).

[36] Cf. I 1–2: *gloria Aeneadum*; II 55: *stirps*; II 295: *mentes*; II 420: *classis*; II 428: *bella*; III 70: *metus*; XIII 767: *Aeneades = Scipio*.

holy fire. Can he please finally grant them a place where they can live in safety? Is it not enough they had to traverse the whole world to find their place of exile? Will Rome be conquered, will the sack of Pergamum happen again? In his answer Jove (v. 570–596) calms Venus down telling her that the Tarpeian Rock is held by her descendants and it will remain in their power for a very long time.[37] He intends to test and judge their valour over the course of a great war. The nation of fierce warriors, once indomitable and joyfully triumphing over all obstacles slowly forgets the ancient glory of their ancestors. The valour of Romans is gradually deteriorating and weakening due to the tempting poison of idleness:

> *… blandoque veneno*
> *Desidiae virtus paulatim evicta senescit* (v. 580–581).[38]

Yet there will come a time when Rome, ruler of the world, will gain more fame out of its current defeats. Suffering (*labor*) will bring forth famous men: Paulus, Fabius and Marcellus. They will give Latium such a great power that their descendants will not be able to undermine it, despite leading lives full of luxury and degeneration.[39] A man has been already born who one day will recall Hannibal from Latium to his homeland and take his arms from him before the walls of his native Carthage. From that moment the descendants of Venus will reign for all time. The

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[37] Assuredly *pars pro toto* of Rome.

[38] Cf. Liv. III 68, 8: *sedemus desides domi mulierum ritu inter nos altercantes, praesenti pace laeti nec cernentes ex otio illo brevi multiplex bellum rediturum*; VII 35, 3: *Non fuga delatos nec inertia relictos hic vos circumvenit hostis: virtute cepistis locum, virtute hinc oportet evadatis*; III 67, 5; IV 32, 2; XXII 60, 8; XXII 60, 17; XXII 60, 21; XXIV 16, 12; XXVI 44, 8.

[39] This is, I believe, another paradox of history, testifying to the extraordinary role of Rome among other nations. Cf. Rut. Namat. I 127–130; 139–140: *Post multas Pyrrhum clades superata fugasti; / Flevit successus Hannibal ipse suos: / Quae mergi nequeunt nisu maiore resurgunt / Exsiliuntque imis altius acta vadis;* […] *Illud te reparat quod cetera regna resolvit: / Ordo renascendi est crescere posse malis*; Liv. XXVI 41, 22: *vos modo, milites, favete nomini Scipionum, suboli imperatorum vestrorum velut accisis recrescenti stirpibus*; Flor. *Praef.* 8: *a Caesare Augusto in saeculum nostrum haut multo minus anni ducenti, quibus inertia Caesarum quasi consenuit atque decoxit, nisi quos sub Traiano principe movit lacertos et praeter spem omnium senectus imperii quasi reddita iuventute revirescit*.

divine valour shall arise to the stars from Cures[40] and the warrior family nourished in the Sabine land will multiply the glory of the deified Julii. This is the start of an elaborate panegyric upon the Flavian family (v. 597–629).[41] The father of the family will give Rome a victory over the hitherto unknown Thule and he will be the first commander to lead armies against the Caledonian forests. He will restrain the wild shores of Rhine and rule Africa vigorously, while in his old age he will subdue in war Idume, famous for her palm groves. Then his son, unsurpassed in the strength of his intellect, will take up the task left him by his father and greatly enhance it. Still in the glow of his first youth, he will finish the war with the wild people of Palestine. Yet only Domitian, the conqueror of Germany, shall outdo all the deeds of his father and brother. Already as a young boy he filled the hearts of the straw-headed Batavians with fear. The fire of the Tarpeian temple shall not frighten him and he will be saved from amid the godless so that he can serve mankind (*sacrilegas inter flammas servabere terris*). In a distant future he will share his role over the heavens with Jove himself. The people of the Ganges will one day lower their unbent bows before him and those of Bactra will display their empty quivers. After his conquest of the North he shall drive his triumphal chariot through Rome. He shall triumph as well over the East and Bacchus will give him his place. Moreover, his oratory skill will surpass all the descendants of Romulus who have gained glory (*decus*) due to their eloquence. The Muses will bring him gifts and Phoebus shall marvel at his songs. He shall also build a golden Capitol[42] on the Tarpeian Rock, in the place where the ancient palace of Jove now stands. Then Domitian as a son of gods and future father of gods shall rule the happy earth with the help of his paternal sceptre. Heaven shall finally welcome him in his old age and Quirinus shall give him his throne. His father and

40 The emperor Vespasian was born in Cures.

41 Silius undoubtedly makes here a reference to well-known literary panegyrics upon emperors, such as Verg. *Georg.* I 24-42; *Aen.* VI 791-805; Luc. I 33-65; Val. Flac. I 7-21; Stat. *Theb.* I 17-33. Cf. Śnieżewski 2010: 60–64.

42 Domitian lavishly rebuilt the temple of Jove. The works were completed in 82 AD.

brother will receive him in the family bosom and his temples shall shine with rays of light.[43]

It is also worth recalling the brief, yet important prayer of Murrus to Hercules (I 505–507). Hearing these words, Hannibal also addressed the god of Tiryns (I 509–514) asking for his benevolence and, as he was known for destroying Carthage many years ago, for his support this time in annihilating the sons of the Phrygian race.

Let me now point out the most important apostrophes. In Book III, v. 222–230, the narrator addresses the Muse Calliope asking her to pass on the news of the people who were called to arms due to a horrid enterprise and led on Latinus' kingdom to the posterity. She should name the cities of indomitable Iberians, armed by Libya, and the troops mustered on the Paraetonian shore, when she dared to demand for herself the reins of government and to give the world a new ruler. Never before has a fiercer storm raged, nor has it ever terrified more the world stricken with fear.

Another short apostrophe can be found at the end of Book II, v. 696–698. The narrator directly addresses the spirits of the tragically deceased inhabitants of Saguntum. They shine as stars (*sidereae animae*), no future generation shall ever become their equal, they should go to Elysium as the glory of this land and make the pure abode of the pious even more beautiful (*castae sedes piorum*).

In Book V, v. 420–424, the narrator poses a rhetorical question to the Muses: which god will be able to describe appropriately all the deaths in the battle on the shores of Lake Trasimene? Which poet can speak the words of despair worthy of such illustrious fallen? Who can tell the story of the young people locked in mortal combat whose only reward was death, or about brave deeds made by those on the verge of death, or perhaps about the madness that overcame the breasts wounded by many missiles? Once again death and madness determine the attitudes of the Romans and the Carthaginians. The remarks on human nature are full of pessimism and despair.

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[43] Cf. Stat. *Silv.* I 1, 95–98: *Cum superis terrena placent, tua turba relicto / Labetur caelo miscebitque oscula iuxta. / Ibit in amplexus natus fraterque paterque / Et soror; una locum cervix dabit omnibus astris*.

I shall now recall the important aetiological stories. The narrator notices that the lofty and heavy with rain clouds summits of the Pyrenees provide a wide vista and separate Spain from Gaul, creating a primeval barrier between these two great countries. These mountains took their name after Pyrene, daughter of Bebryx and a victim of Alcides. For Hercules, on a mission to complete one of his twelve labours, heading for the far country of the triform Geryon, drunk with wine in the court of wild Bebryx raped his virgin daughter Pyrene. The narrator insists it was the god who caused the death of the poor girl. When she gave birth to a snake, she fled her beloved family home, being terribly afraid of her father's anger. Then when she complained of her rapist's ingratitude and stretched out her hands in supplication to beg her former guest for help she was torn into pieces by wild animals. When Hercules saw her massacred body he paled, dizzy with pain. In his despair he kept shouting the name Pyrene. All the rocks and shelters of the wild beasts echoed her name. The passage of time, as the narrator says, shall never destroy her name. The mountains will forever bear the name that caused such great sadness (III 415–441). One could ask what is the aim of this *aition*? Perhaps it fits the overall dark and cruel nature of the epic poem and once again has a proleptic character. It is also possible that the narrator wanted to display the dark side of human nature and highlight human insanity. Hercules is a good example as his nature is extremely ambiguous. On the one hand, he is a benefactor of humankind, yet on the other he is prone to violent outbursts of uncontrolled anger and madness.[44]

In Book V 7–23 the narrator tells the aetiological story of Lake Trasimene. In ancient times the rule over the lake was held by Arnus. His father was Tyrrhenus, a Lydian and the pride of Tmolus. One day, after a long sea voyage he brought the people of Maeonia to the Latin shores and gave the land his own name. Being ambitious, he raised his son for a greater destiny. The nymph Agylle fell in love with the young Trasimene for he was truly so beautiful that he could rival the gods. Agylle cast away her maidenly shame, abducted him from the

[44] Hercules appears in the epos many times, e.g. III 514; XII 360; II 356; II 483; I 585; I 142; II 191; III 263; I 199; XII 118; I 369; IV 4; XII 143; I 273; IV 224; VI 636; VII 50; VII 44; XII 433; II 150; III 32; III 91; III 421; III 429; I 505; I 511; II 582; IX 293; XII 119; IV 64; VI 183; XV 79; III 433; III 496; VI 628; VII 592; XVII 650. Cf. Tipping 2010b: 193; 196; 206; 209.

shore and carried him off into the depths. Her young heart was quick to feel the charm of youthful beauty and with no reluctance caught fire from the arrow of the Idalian goddess. The naiads in their deep green caves comforted and nursed the boy when he trembled in fear of Agylle's embrace and her watery realm. From him the lake, a gift from his bride, took its name and the water, aware of the marital joy, still bears the name of Trasimene. As with the previous example of an *aition* we need to ask ourselves what function it plays in the poem. It is possible that the narrator wanted to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the place made infamous by the defeat of the Romans. We can also suspect that Silius wanted to rival (*aemulatio*) Valerius Flaccus who in his epos told a very similar story of Hylas:

> … *nil umbra comaeque*
> *Turbavitque sonus surgentis ad oscula Nymphae.*
> *Illa avidas iniecta manus heu sera cientem*
> *Auxilia et magni referentem nomen amici*
> *Detrahit; adiutae prono nam pondere vires* (III 560–564).

Another similar story, this time about Hermaphrodite, can be read in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV 285–388).

It is also worth having a closer look at some important genealogies. Amid those fighting in the battle of Saguntum, Asbyte was distinguished by her courage. She was the daughter of Hiarbas from the tribe of Garamantians. She was used to living alone and she spent her early years in forests, chasing after game. She loved Dictynna, gorges, chases after breathless horses and pitiless killing of wild beasts. She was conspicuous in her native clothes and long hair, bound with a gift from Hesperides; she ran her smoking chariot and a shield shone on her left arm (II 56–81). The narrator seems to emphasize the cruelty of Asbyte here; in this respect she was in no way inferior to men.

A bit further on (II 89–115) the narrator tells us the story of Mopsus. He came from Crete. Already as a young man he was a great archer and used to cover the gorges of Dictynna with his winged arrows. Gortyna, as the narrator points out, had many reasons to boast of Mopsus than of any other archer. But when he became poor and no longer wanted to spend his whole day hunting, he was forced to travel across the sea

with his wife Meroe and his sons. Fate led him to the ill-fated Saguntum. In verses 553–557 of this book we find a short story of Tiburna. After losing her husband Murrus she cried over her marriage bed, emptied by the war, and the cruel turmoil of war. She came from a noble family which derived its beginnings from the blood of Daunus. Another example is the genealogy of Hannibal's wife, Imilce (III 97–106), who traced her pedigree to Castalius of Cirrha, a priest of Phoebus who gave his city the name Castulo, after his mother. It remained unchanged. While Bacchus was conquering the Iberian peoples and attacking Calpe with thyrsus-poles and spears of the Maenads, Milichus was born out of a lascivious Satyr and nymph Myrice. He held a wide authority over the native people and he bore horns, just as his father once did, which grew upon his forehead. The homeland and noble blood of Imilce's family was derived from him.

In the first five books of the epos an important role is played by vivid comparisons. I shall commence their analysis with Book II, v. 211–224. When Hannibal's bronze shield flared with light and his weapon, prophesising death, sang in his quick hands the terrified enemies hurriedly turned back and rushed towards the city walls. The narrator adds his commentary here writing that Hannibal was like an evening which at dusk sends the birds flying from the feeding grounds to their well-known nests. He points out as well his similarity to Cecropian Hymettus that scares the swarms of bees, dispersed over flowers with a heavy raincloud. The narrator comments that fear hastens the terrified people and they run blindly toward the walls. A reflection of a philosophical nature comes up next. The narrator rhetorically asks why people fear death so much if it is certain it will arrive one day any way and that day is determined by fate at the time of their birth. Another passage I wish to discuss in Book II can be found in verses 681–691. The miserable bodies of the people from Saguntum lie half burned by fire, randomly, one upon another. An association occurs to the narrator with a lion which, feeling pangs of hunger, finally runs victorious into a sheep shed and devours a defenceless sheep with his parched, yawning maw. Trickles of blood burst from his powerful jaws. After his meal he lays down on a black pile of half-devoured victims or, gnashing his teeth and rumbling proudly, he walks amid the mangled remains of animals. The sheep lie everywhere, pell-mell, as well as the Molossian dog that guarded them, the band of

shepherds and the owner of the flock and shed; their tents are completely destroyed, their abodes in ruin.

In Book III, v. 294–297, the narrator says that a nimble Spartan dog fills thick undergrowth with pointless baying, making terrified herds of swift bucks run blindly in various directions. A bit further in verses 529–539 the narrator tells us about the Carthaginians depressed by the monotonous view of the Alps covered in deep snow. What comes to mind is a comparison with a sailor on the wide calm sea, when he left behind his beloved land and the lowered sails on the idle mast cannot catch even the slightest breeze. The man gazes then on the limitless expanse of water and turns his tired eyes towards the sky, as he can no longer bear to look at the depths of the sea.

In Book IV, v. 243–247, Scipio raged on an agitated plain similarly to the Thracian Boreas when in his victory he stirred up the whole Icarian sea from the bottom. The ships scattered, the sailors dispersed, hurled here and there amid the abyss, the all the Cyclades were flooded with foaming sea water. A bit further, in verses 275–278, a simile is directed towards Mimas, the son of Earth. As Mimas fought on the fields of Phlegra and terrified Heaven, so Crixus sent forth from a powerful cry his barbarian breast and increased his rage with a terrifying roar. In verses 300–307 after Crixus' death the Celts took to their heels. The narrator says that they pinned all their hope and valour on one man. So the hunter on the top of Mount Picanus combs out the hidden dens of wild beasts and, forcing his way through the undergrowth unspoiled by human feet, spreads terrible destruction in the impenetrable lairs.

In Hannibal's entourage some personifications appear, such as Fear, Terror and Madness (IV 325–336). No one cares about an honourable death, everyone seeks to escape and prays to the earth to swallow them. So when a tigress comes out of her cave in Caucasus the whole plain becomes empty and all the living things, terrified of her raging maw, seek safe hiding places. Victorious, she wonders in the desolate valleys, draws back her lips and slowly bares her teeth, as if she were crushing bodies and planning a massacre with her might jaws.

In verses 370–379 a fight between brothers invokes a comparison with lions. Lions fight brutally with one another and fill the abandoned fields and far away huts with their hoarse roar. All the Maurs hurriedly run towards inaccessible crags and desolate rocks, while a Libyan mother

puts her children to her breasts, to muffle their cries. The lions roar terribly and the bones held in their bloody jaws crack loudly. In verses IV 520–524 there is a comparison with a rapid stream which roars as a thunder when it falls into a vale from the lofty peak of Pindos. A mighty crack is heard and half the side of the mountain falls down. It takes herds, wild animals and forests with it. The foaming wave echoes in the rocky valleys. In a further section of Book IV 560–566 the hunter Allius is attacked by Mago and Maharbal. The narrator compares this scene with the behaviour of two bears which, forced by hunger, run down from two opposite rocks to fall upon a bull terrified by their duel. Rage (*furor*) does not allow them to divide their spoil. So fierce Allius is slain by two javelins which struck him from both sides. One more example from Book IV, v. 776–777. Imilce is similar to a Bacchant (*Edonis*)[45] in Thrace. Driven into a frenzy during the festival of Bacchus, recurring every three years, she runs over the heights of Mount Pangaeus and breathes out the god hidden in her chest.

I'm passing to the analysis of similes in Book V. An ambush prepared by the Roman soldiers near Lake Trasimene can be likened to the actions of a clever fisherman (V 47–52). The narrator comments that near the translucent waves a fisherman weaves a net to catch fish. He weaves the inner part of the net with particular attention, gradually making the mesh smaller towards the centre, so that it tappers to a point; thus when later fishing in a stream he can cut off the escape route by cunningly contracting the entrance to the trap.

Atlas (V 280–286) is similar to a doe that trembles while she is pursued by a Hyrcanian tigress, or to a dove that reduces her wingspan, or to a hare that jumps into bushes at the sight of an eagle hovering with outstretched wings in the clear sky.

Appius (V 309–315) resembles a lion that, having run down from the wooded hills, crouches down in the plains. Though he is tormented by pangs of hunger, he contracts his limbs at the sight of the horns of a wild bull. The lion looks fixedly at the muscles on the mighty neck or the eyes set beneath a shaggy forehead and observes how the bull paws the dust, preparing for an attack.

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45 Cf. Ovid. *Met.* XI 69; Prop. I 3, 5; Luc. I 675.

Consul Flaminius (V 382–400) fighting with the Carthaginians is similar to Jove who lashes the earth with vehement rain and cracking hail and throws thunders either at the peaks of the Alps or the Ceraunian mountains that reach to heaven. Land, sea and sky tremble at the same time, and Tartarus itself is shaken when the whole universe quakes. The narrator adds that father Ocean together with cruel Tethys strikes at Calpe, a Pillar of Hercules, and drives the turbulent waves into the hollow interior of the mountain. The protruding boulders moan and Tartessus who is far removed and separated by wide-stretching lands hears how the breakers crash on the rocks. Lixus hears the same thing across a great expanse of sea.

The last example of a simile is extremely atypical. The cowardly soldiers who sought salvation on the trees fall down deceived by branches, rotten with old age, while others who are in their terror hanging from the treetops present an easy target for arrows. The narrator shows that in a similar way Zephyrus blasts into ancient groves and rocks a bird in its nest so that it has trouble staying on the top of a shaking tree (V 495–506).[46]

Another aspect worth notice is the presence of didactic elements embedded in the structure of the epos. Let me recall here the most important example. In Book III 45–60 the narrator introduces Hannibal who observes a spectacular natural phenomenon in Gades.[47] The sea, rising enormous waves, has suddenly invaded the land so that the whole shore and fields are flooded with high water. Where Nereus comes forth from azure caverns and churns up the waters of Neptune from the deep, the sea overflows and Ocean, opening his hidden springs, rushes in with rapid waves. The waters, as if they were violently churned up by a trident, strive to cover the land with the rough sea. Soon the depths recede and turn back with the tide; the ships, robbed of the sea, are stranded in the shallows and the sailors wait till the waters rush back to their former state. The Moon agitates the kingdom of the wandering Cymothoe and stirs up the depths of the sea. Driving her chariot through the roads of sky she orders the waters in various directions and Tethys follows her

[46] Cf. also V 603–606: *Sic memorans torquet fumantem ex ore vaporem, / Iraque anhelatum proturbat pectore murmur, / Ut multo accensis fervore exuberat undis, / Clausus ubi exusto liquor indignatur aeno*.

[47] Cf. Manolaraki 2010: 293–321.

with ebb and flow. What could be the function of this description of the tides in the epos? Perhaps it reflects the changing fates of the Second Punic War, the unexpected and violent changes it underwent? On the other hand, it can simply be a testimony of the writer's erudition (*poeta doctus*) who wanted to share such an unusual natural phenomenon with his audience.

I would also like to bring the reader's attention to the descriptions of the element of water. The river Druentia, bristling with tree trunks and rocks changed the joyous march of Hannibal through the lands of the Vocontii into a disaster. With its source in the Alps, the river carries along with a roar the uprooted ash-trees and torn off boulders. The waters storm on fiercely, often changing the riverbed and creating traitorous shallows. Neither a traveller on foot can trust them, nor a wide ship can feel safe in its waves.[48] Stirred up after heavy rains they keep taking armed soldiers, engulfing them in foamy vortices and burying the mutilated and ragged bodies in the depths (III 468–476).

According to the narrator, the river Ticinus protects its blue waters from pollution in its riverbed full of shallows and flows slowly in a pale green stream. Its shores are shadowed, birds rival one another in sweet songs and the light reflected on the surface tempts you to sleep (IV 81–87).

The river Trebia, obedient to Juno's request, is, according to the narrator, a bad omen for the Romans. It started an audacious attach on the exhausted Romans, the earth caved in and swallowed up the bodies of the fugitives. Then it covered them with treacherous mire. Their movements were restricted by mud that stuck to everything, the softened shore trapped them or made them fall by some unseen trick. Everyone tried to make their way to the trackless shore and fought against the rotten turf. Sadly, all of them died, crushed with their own fall (IV 573–584).

At the very end I would like to devote a few words to the descriptions of weapons. They could not be missed in a poem of a military nature. During the siege of Saguntum Hannibal soaks in tar and throws a smoking brand or attacks energetically, using sharpened stakes, javelins or

[48] Cf. Luc. I 213–222; especially 217–219: *Tum vires praebebat hiems, atque auxerat undas / Tertia iam gravido pluvialis Cynthia cornu / Et madidis Euri resolutae flatibus Alpes* (the description of the Rubicon); IV 56–143 (the spring rains and flood in Ilerda in Spain).

stones; he takes from the quiver arrows and dips them in poisonous snake venom, then shoots them, doubly mortal (I 319–323). The Phocaean catapult[49] launches with a whistle huge boulders due to its tightly strung cord. The same catapult, after changing the weight of the heavy missile, discharges ash-trunks tipped with iron, causing a great disarray amid the ranks (I 334–337). A special attention should be given to the description of the heavy *phalarica*. This was a terrible missile made of wood, selected especially in the mountainous regions of the snowy Pyrenees, a weapon that could hardly be stopped by walls. It ended in a point which was smeared with tar and rubbed with black sulphur, then set on fire. Once it was thrown, as if it were a thunder that strikes from the highest walls of the citadel, it cut through the furrowed air with a flickering flame, as if it were a meteor that falls down from the sky to earth blinding people's eyes with its blood red tail (I 350–364).[50] Rumour (*Fama*), spreading through the terrified cities of Ausonia, told that the Carthaginians passed through the unfriendly wasteland and that Hannibal descended from the Alps, boasting that he rivalled the deeds of Hercules. The narrator comments that people started to prepare for war in all haste and that Mars stirred to activity all the armed men in Ausonia. They remake their javelins, clean their swords from rust and make them shine cruelly. Helmets, long disused, are covered anew with long white plumes. Spears are strengthened with thongs; some repair their bows, others tame froathing steeds and sharpen their swords on a whetting stone etc. (IV 1–26).

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To recapitulate, one should conclude that the first five books of Silius Italicus' epos are characterised by a variety of structural elements. Let me return to the aim of this paper. I tried to show that the most important role is played by Hannibal. All the events of the represented world concentrate around his person. The narrator characterises him through both direct and reported speech; a particular role is played by the military contexts and the elaborate (often very graphic) historical and

[49] It is a catapult made in Marseilles. It is called Phocaean because Marseilles was a colony of Phocaea in Asia Minor.

[50] Cf. I 539; II 107; II 139; II 260.

mythological ekphrases and descriptions of weapons. Important battles are accompanied by colourful and often terrifying omens (*omina*). Remarks on the cults of gods are relatively rare. There are two noteworthy aetiological stories (Pyrene and Lake Trasimene) which, it seems, were invented by Silius himself. The narrator often uses apostrophe and presents vivid mythological genealogies of the protagonists. It is likely that these are also his original inventions. The well-developed similes in which the narrator uses abundantly elements of Greek literature and culture are typical for epic poetry. The comparative material often relates to the natural world, i.e. to Roman, Greek, African and Spanish fauna and flora. Sometimes proleptic statements, retardations, rhetorical questions occur. An important role is played by a didactic element (e.g. ocean tides, references to astronomy and astrology), therefore we can describe Silius Italicus as *poeta doctus*. This is certainly the influence of the learned Hellenistic poetry, as well as Latin examples, especially Ennius, Vergil, Lucan and Valerius Flaccus. In many cases Silius' *aemulatio* with his great predecessors brings very positive results. I noticed that Silius' style is becoming close the style used by the writers of historiography, such as Livy and Sallust more than once. Some sentences and sporadic remarks of a philosophical nature, which brings Silius closer to Papinius Statius, author of the *Silvae* can also be perceived. The panegyrical elements (mostly relating to the Flavian dynasty and Domitian in particular) are well developed. A surprising, or even paradoxical and irrational role is played by the goddess Fides who encourages the citizens of Saguntum to commit collective suicide. This is certainly a not particularly successful attempt to exonerate the Romans, especially the senators, from not giving their help to loyal allies. One could say that this time we are looking at *perfidia* of Rome though naturally Silius never mentions that. What is surprising for the reader of the poem is a very faint presence of colours. Instead cruelty, violence and suffering dominates, evident in the actions of both sides of the conflict. Interestingly, the eulogist of the Roman moral and military values is Hannon, the decided opponent of Hannibal. When it comes to irrational elements, the most important role is played by *fortuna*; *fatum* appears only marginally.[51] The narrator's

[51] I see here a similarity to Sallust's vision of history.

sympathy often lies with those injured by gods and evil fate. He sees the tragic nature of a man and his helplessness in the face of almighty death.

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