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On Silivs Italicvs

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The Classical Quarterly / Volume 3 / Issue 04 / October 1909, pp 254 - 257

DOI: 10.1017/S0009838800018450, Published online: 11 February 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009838800018450

How to cite this article:

S. G. Owen (1909). On Silivs Italicvs. The Classical Quarterly, 3, pp 254-257 doi:10.1017/S0009838800018450

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ON SILIVS ITALICVS.

I.

BEFORE proceeding to consider certain passages of Silius in detail I should like to enter a protest against the undue disparagement which has been meted out to this poet. The letter of Pliny (iii. 7), containing reflexions suggested by the voluntary death by which with stoical fortitude he sought release from the agony of an incurable tumour, presents to us a character which if not great was attractive; the character of a wealthy and kindly noble, who had made no enemies; one whose house was the resort of men of letters; a devotee of poetry, who worshipped Vergil with almost religious veneration; a lover of the beautiful, who found his pleasure according to the accepted Roman fashion in amassing works of art and tasteful country mansions. Pliny's terse criticism of his poem '*scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio*' is more just than that of modern critics. Though Silius is not a great poet, a poet he is, with merits distinctly his own. His *Punica* (which has no real hero) is hardly an epic proper, but is rather a chronicle in verse: as such its author displays considerable skill in the clearness with which he marshals the mass of events, and in the realistic force of his descriptions, especially that of the plague (xiv. 580 ff.), and those of the numerous battles, and particularly of the sea-fights (*e.g.* xiv. 539–556); and in the elaboration of geographical detail, where the vividness of the topographical presentation shows a well-trained eye and no common literary power (*e.g.* especially xii. 518 ff.) The numerous episodes which enliven the poem, such as the legend of Pyrene (iii. 420 ff.), the killing of the monster serpent (vi. 204 ff.), the pretty description of Pan (xiii. 326 ff.), are executed with much imaginative fancy which recalls the manner of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Again there is a dignity and sustained elevation of language which results not unfrequently in vigorous, well-turned phrases of no ordinary merit. Such are the expression for an echo xiv. 365 '*clamat scopulis clamoris imago*,' or for breaking through the ranks of the treacherous Greeks xvii. 425 '*periuria Graia resignat*,' or again the fine line describing the sobbing sound made by water rushing into a wrecked ship's hull and out again xiv. 550 '*mox sua ponto | singultante anima propulsa refunditur unda*.'

II.

ii. 614-615

princeps Tisiphone, lentum indignata parentem,
pressit ouans capulum.

The subject is the killing of their own families by the Saguntines. On account of the difficulty in explaining the word 'parentem' it was altered by D. Heinsius to 'pauentum' followed by Summers (*C.R.* xiii. 299). I have suggested 'paratum' (*C.R.* xix. 174.), but I am now inclined to think that no alteration should be made: the meaning is 'Tisiphone resenting the indifference of her parent,' viz. Pluto the Lord of Hell, who does not trouble himself about accelerating the slaughter, though it is his business to produce death: *Hor. epp.* ii. 2. 179, 'metit Orcus grandia cum paruis.' Pluto according to one legend was the father of the Erinyes, *Orph. hymn.* 68. 8, 69. 2, *Verg. Aen.* vii. 327. Servius ad loc.

v. 568

immemor annorum seniumque oblitus.

Read 'seniique'; for the open i see xvii. 152 'auxilii.' Though 'obliuiscor' may govern an acc. or gen. equally well, the fondness of Silius for the gen. makes it probable that he used that case. The mistake arose from assimilation to the termination of 'annorum.' In iv. 422 we have 'oblitumque sui.' Cp. *Verg. Geor.* iii. 498.

vi. 168

scire nemus pacemque loci explorare libebat.

Here Summers accepts Burmann's 'faciem' for the absurd 'pacem.' I prefer 'speciem' which accounts for the *p*, and equally well means the aspect of the place. See *Stat. Silu.* ii. 2. 41 'species cultusque locorum'; ii. 5. 89 'magnificas species cultusque locorum'; iv. 2. 30 'longa super species (view).' *Plaut. Pers.* 550 'urbis speciem uidi.'

ix. 314-315

acrius insanus dextra qua ducitur ensis,
bellantum pars magna iacet.

The passage is from the beginning of the account of the battle of Cannae. The first of these lines is so ugly that it seems to require alteration, but I cannot with Summers accept Gronovius' 'ac prius' for 'acrius,' which would mean that before the sword was drawn a large number of combatants was killed by the fire of missiles described immediately above. Such a statement would be a gross exaggeration; for *Livy* (xxii. 47), whom *Silius* closely follows, says nothing of the fire of missiles, but after remarking 'clamore sublato procursum ab auxiliis et pugna leuibis primum armis commissa,' proceeds at once to describe the hand to hand fighting; as indeed *Silius* also does in the

succeeding lines. Therefore I refer this line also to the hand to hand fighting, and read

acrius in stragem dextra qua ducitur ensis,

comparing 372 'nec tanta uitam iam strage uolebat' and for 'in' 458 'porgebat protinus ensem Aetnaeum in pugnas.' Dr. Postgate points out that Lucan vii. 490 'odiis solus ciuilibus ensis | sufficit et dextras Romana in uiscera ducit' seems to support my view.

xi. 372-374

Carthaginis arces

ire ferox Mago et patribus portare iubetur
nuncia facta ducis.

It is impossible to translate 'nuncia facta' as 'news of the deeds,' hence Blass proposed to read 'nuntius acta,' which is printed by Summers. Nearer to the MSS. is 'nunc iam facta' 'to report the general's exploits at this instant.'

xii. 407-408

nimium, iuuenis, nimiumque superbi
sperata hausisti.

This is explained thus by Barth, 'nimium superbi et nimium iuuenis sperata animo concepisti': but the expression is awkward, and numerous conjectures have been offered. It seems clear that 'nimium nimiumque' should be taken together; the repetition implies added earnestness as in Ov. *Her.* i. 41 'o nimium nimiumque oblite tuorum'; Tibull. iii. 6. 21 'conuenit iratus nimium nimiumque seueros.' I think the corruption lies in 'sperata,' for which I read 'spe tanta,' and alter 'superbi' to 'superbe,' *i.e.* 'warrior, you have aspired after something far too ambitious in your hopes.'

xii. 479-480

sed non, ut scitum celerare ad moenia Poenum,
astabat res ulla loco.

Here 'astabat' gives no meaning. Silius is describing the measures taken to defend Rome, when Hannibal made his hurried march thither in order to create a diversion from the siege of Capua. He goes on to say that both consuls hastened to Rome; forces were brought from Nola and from Arpi and so forth. Accordingly 'res' seems to mean the power of Rome, as in the converse expression of Livy (xxi. 16) 'nec rem Romanam tam desidem umquam fuisse atque imbellem.' If for 'astabat' be read 'abstiterat' a satisfactory meaning is got, 'their power had in no wise retired from the proper place,' *i.e.* their power had not failed them where it should do. Silius affects 'absisto' with an abl.: ii. 325, 371; vi. 342; vii. 394; xv. 190; xvi. 223; (Bauer proposed 'abstabat,' a very doubtful word).

xii. 577-578

per plurima uestra,
o socii, decora et sacras in sanguine dextras.

Hannibal is addressing his own troops before the walls of Rome. What may be the meaning of 'hands which are sacred in blood' I don't know, nor did Heinsius, who conjectured 'saturatas sanguine.' I think that Silius wrote 'sacratas sanguine dextras' 'hands immortalised by bloodshed.' 'Sacrare' means to immortalise in Hor. *ep.* ii. 1. 49 'miraturque nihil nisi quod Libitina sacrauit.' For the abl. see Liv. xxiii. 9. 3 'sacratas fide manus.' I suppose 'sacras' was written by haplography for 'sacratas,' and 'in' was a clumsily devised metrical supplement.

xiv. 350-351

non illum mundi numerasse capacis harenas
una fides.

Here the MSS. vary between 'una' and 'uana'; the Coloniensis had 'una,' preferred by Heinsius: Summers accepts 'uana': Heinsius was right. The meaning is that there is more than one evidence to the fact that Archimedes succeeded in calculating the size of the earth's surface. Ov. *ex Pont.* i. 5. 32 'sumque fides huius maxima uocis ego.'

xiv. 654-656

non usquam clarior illo
gloria picturae saeclo; non aera iuuabat (or 'iuuabant')
quem scire ephyren.

Read

non aera iuuabant
quaesita ex Ephyre.

The Syracusans did not care for bronzes brought from Corinth, so fine were their own.

xv. 536-537

hunc etiam, uastis qui nunc sese intulit oris,
perpetiar?

The phantom of Italy appearing to Claudius Nero bewails Hannibal's devastation of Italy. For 'uastis' read 'nostris.' Cp. sup. 525 'nostris considerare in oris.'

xvi. 590-591

ad maiora iubent praesagi tendere uates:
id monstrare deos atque hoc portendere signis.

'The prophetic seers bid them aim at greater things: that, they say, is what the gods indicate and foreshadow by signs.' But why 'id' 'hoc'? It should be 'id' 'id' or 'hoc' 'hoc.' Read 'his portendere signis.' Heinsius proposed 'hoc—signo.'

S. G. OWEN.