

“It’s Complicated”: Silius’ Camillus and the Camillus of his predecessors

M. Furius Camillus is one of those ancient figures about whom we know maddeningly less than the average Roman (Bruun 2000); the stories surrounding this hero had far broader associations than those easily accessible to us. Jan Gaertner has shown how much he shaped (and was shaped by) the political and literary discourses of the late Republic (Gaertner 2008), while Fratantuono (forthcoming), Farrell (2013), and Egan (2012) have recently analyzed Camillus’ role in Augustan poetry. Camillus’ significance in the late Republic and Augustan age, it seems, is being brought to light.

It’s an apt time to bring that learning to bear on the literature of the next century. Silius’ *Punica* is fertile ground, for Camillus is central to understanding the poet’s aims in the epic (Marks 2005). But most readings of him in Silius are one-sided: he is the dutiful, selfless hero (Bernstein 2008, Littlewood 2011). In this paper, I show that Silius’ use of the Camillus-tradition in *Punica* 7 sometimes bolsters, and other times questions, the *status quaestionis*. This approach yields not only further insight into Silius’ aims, but also elucidates some of the tradition’s more opaque references, especially *Aen.* 6.825.

In *Punica* 7 Silius regularly associates Q. Fabius Maximus with Camillus. For instance, when Fabius, though dictator, is forced to share military command with his Master of Horse Minucius, the resulting power-struggle is portrayed like the one between M. and L. Furius Camillus in Liv. 6. While Minucius’ quasi-rebellion has undermined his authority, Fabius thinks it the gravest sin to nurse hatred for his fellow countryman, even one who has wronged him. Just think of Camillus, Fabius says (*Pun.* 7.557-63): getting exiled did not stop him from helping Rome. At this point, most modern readings consider the case closed: Camillus is an unambiguously positive model for Fabius. But that is only half the story. Camillus was, in fact,

enraged at his exile; before his return, his plans had to be pacified (*Pun.* 7.560-61: *pacata consulta*) and “his mind” made “impenetrable to his anger” (*mens impenetrabilis irae*). Silius’ point in these lines is unclear unless we know the broader Camillus-tradition to which he is alluding. Livy (5.32.9), Plutarch (*Cam.* 13.1), and Appian (*Ital.* fr. 8.2) tell us that Camillus’ anger was just like Achilles’: such was Camillus’ wrath that he, like his epic forebear, put a curse on his countrymen, praying that they suffer to such a degree that they wish for his return. Is that heroic selflessness? Silius’ Camillus may not be the selfless hero Fabius makes him out to be.

In other cases, Silius’ allusions to the broader Camillus-tradition bolster the readings of the consensus. For instance, Fabius’ quarrel with Minucius is often read as a kind of civil war. This discord only stops when Minucius commands his soldiers to “return the standards” (*Pun.* 7.742: *signa referte*) to Fabius, an allusion to Vergil’s *referentem signa Camillum* (*Aen.* 6.825). That line, however, is enigmatic: what Vergil intends to convey through *signa* is unclear. Most scholars suspect that Camillus is a unifying figure, counterbalancing the factiousness of Vergil’s next pair of heroes in the underworld-parade, Caesar and Pompey (cf. Lucan’s antiphrastic allusion at BC 2.598-99: *placuitque referri / signa*).

As his allusion suggests, Silius reads Camillus at *Aen.* 6.825 in this way: a character who recalls the threat of civil discord, but who avoids it in his lifetime. Yet as the poets knew, civil war awaited Rome after Camillus (viz. the sequence Camillus→Caesar/Pompey in *Aeneid* 6). Silius’ Camillus is a complicated hero, just as he was already in Ovid’s *Fasti* (Farrell) and in the *Aeneid*. All the more clearly in the *Punica*, he is at best a delay, a *mora*, for Rome’s eventual decline into factious upheaval.

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