

Allusions to Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* in the *Punica* of Silius Italicus

This paper examines Silius Italicus' dynamic engagement with Valerius Flaccus. I demonstrate that in *Punica* 11 Silius highlights Valerius' *Argonautica* as an important model before illustrating how Silius enriches his text by reworking Valerian material in *Punica* 9.

Scholars of Flavian epic have noted that the interplay between Silius' *Punica* and Valerius' *Argonautica* deserves more attention than it has received (see Dominik 2010, 446). Of course, this subject has not been completely ignored, as some excellent analyses of Silius' relationship with Valerius have been produced (see Ripoll 1999; Augoustakis 2014; Stocks 2014, 70-3). My examination seeks to supplement these studies and to inspire others to join the cause.

As Hannibal lingers in Capua, he enjoys the music of a poet named Teuthras, who sings about the power of the lyre, and particularly Orpheus' mastery of it (*Pun.* 11.432-82). This song has a meta-poetic dimension: Teuthras is a symbol for Silius himself, and so the content of his song provides auto-referential commentary on the composition of the *Punica* (see Schenk 1989; Augoustakis 2015, 165-6). I am especially interested in Teuthras' description of Orpheus' role in helping to launch the Argo with his lyre-playing (469-72): *quin etiam, Pagasaea_ratis cum caerulea, nondum / cognita terrenae pontumque intrare negaret, / ad puppim sacrae cithara elicente carinae / adductum cantu uenit mare*. Silius' periphrasis for Argo (*Pagasaea ratis*) recalls similar wording in Valerius' *Argonautica* (*Pagasaea...puppis*, 8.378; *Pagaseia puppis*, 1.422). Moreover, Teuthras describes the ship as 'holy' (*sacrae...carinae*), which recalls the sacrosanctity ascribed to the Argo by Valerius (*rate...sacra*, 6.10). Even more telling is that Teuthras credits Orpheus' lyre-playing with helping to launch the Argo. Orpheus' use of the lyre to aid the Argo's launch is a prominent feature of Valerius' narrative and one that distinguishes

his version from that of Apollonius of Rhodes, who does not mention Orpheus during Argo's initial entry into the sea (*Arg.* 1.186-7): ...*decurrunt intrantque fretum. non clamor anhelis / nauticus aut blandus testudine defuit Orpheus*. In fact, Silius' text echoes this Valerian passage, as Teuthras' *pontumque intrare* (11.470) recalls Valerius' *inrantque fretum*.

Given the meta-poetic nature of Teuthras' song, his allusions to Valerius' *Argonautica* advertise Silius' engagement with his Flavian predecessor as an important aspect of the *Punica*'s composition. Silius' focus on the Argo's launch evokes Valerius' poetic enterprise, which depicts the birth of epic poetry as the trail-blazing first 'vessel of epic song' sets out on its maiden voyage (see Stover 2012, 27-77). Valerius' Argo is thus a symbol of epic composition, and Silius here acknowledges that he is following in Argo's wake and that he holds Valerius' poem in high regard. Not only does Teuthras' reference to Orpheus foreground the poetic skill required to launch the Argo, but he also calls the ship 'holy' (*sacrae...carinae*), an adjective that is often used of poets and the sublimity of their utterances (*OLD* s.v. 8a). In fact, Silius applies the term *sacer* to Ennius (12.408) and Homer (13.782). In this way Silius shows respect for Valerius' skillful navigation of the 'high seas of epic' while advertising the importance of his predecessor's trail-blazing performance for his own poetic composition.

A good example of how Silius enriches his poem via allusion to Valerius is found at *Punica* 9.158. There the line ending *natumque parenti* echoes *Argonautica* 6.127 (*natusque parensque*), also found at the end of the line. Valerius employs the phrase in a description of the Iazyges, whose men avoid growing old by having their own sons kill them. In Silius the phrase is spoken by Solimus as he realizes he has mistakenly killed his father! The strange heroism of Valerius' Iazyges evoked by Silius' allusion is thus reworked into a scene of utter horror as

Solimus' private tragedy tinges the *Punica* with a mood of dark foreboding on the eve of Cannae.

In sum, this paper aims to demonstrate that careful scrutiny of Silius' engagement with Valerius' *Argonautica* enables us to better appreciate the subtlety, nuance, and complex intertextuality of the *Punica*.

Works Cited

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