Petrarch and Silius Italicus: a Survey on a controversial Topic[*]

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1. About *Punica* and *Africa*

By the end of the first century a.D., more precisely between 83 and 96 a.D., the orator and ex-consul Silius Italicus was working on the composition of a conspicuous historical poem dealing with the second war fought between Rome and Carthage (218-202 b.C.). This work, entitled *Punica*, consists of 17 books, and represents the longest poem in ancient Latin literature. The *Punica* did not enjoy much success: with few quotations in ancient times, it received a poor evaluation by Plinius the Younger (*Ep*. 3.7.5), according to whom Silius *scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio* ('he wrote poems with more care than creativity'). It seems they had no diffusion during the Middle Ages.[1] In 1417, on the occasion of his presence at the Council of Constance, Poggio Bracciolini found a copy of the work, probably in the library of Saint Gall Monastery. He communicated the discovery to the Venetian patrician Francis Barbaro, who, in a letter from Venice, on 6 July 1417, acknowledges to his friend that he has brought to light many works of classical antiquity, including the *Punica*.[2] Poggio's discovery ensured a conspicuous spread to the poem that, during the Renaissance, was frequently copied,[3] published in printed editions, accompanied by comments from eminent humanists, including Pomponio Leto and Pietro Marso.[4] Although later, especially during the twentieth century, *Punica* did not receive great appreciation,[5] today scholars look at that poem

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[1] Some authors of the late ancient period, whose works contain textual memories of *Punica*, are listed by Basset-Delz-Dunston (1976), 345-346; for the few testimonies of knowledge of *Punica* in the Middle Ages see *ibid.*, 346-347, and Reeve (1983), 389.

[2] See the letter in Griggio (1999), 71-79: 72; further testimonies of the discovery are quoted by Delz (1987), vi-vii.

[3] Thirty-two renaissance manuscripts are known and descripted by Basset-Delz-Dunston (1976), 364-365 and by Delz (1987), ix-l.

[4] About the great diffusion of the *Punica* in the Renaissance see Basset-Delz-Dunston (1976), *passim*, but especially 349-357 and 361-390; see also Muecke (2010).

[5] Notoriously, many negative judgments have been expressed on the artistic value of the *Punica*. I would like to mention here the one by Paratore (1986), 652, who describes Silius as a man of great

with greater interest and attention, considering it within the cultural context of its time.[6]

Around 1338 Francis Petrarch in his solitary dwelling of Valchiusa by Avignon started putting in writing a poem entitled *Africa*, based on the same subject matter that was dealt with by Silius Italicus many centuries before: the second war fought by the Romans against Carthaginians. Petrarch composed the first four books in Valchiusa, and followed up in Italy starting in 1343, when he lived in Selvapiana, not far from Parma. Here he composed the books 5 to 9; book 9 tells the end of the story with Scipio's triumph in Rome. But the poem was still incomplete: a connection between books 4 and 5 was in fact missing. A large part of the material was just drafted. Petrarch returned working on it later, when he was once again in Provence, between 1351 and 1353, but he never actually managed to complete the work, nor did he ever consent to its diffusion. The publication of the *Africa*, still in a draft version, was taken care of after Petrarch's death, at the end of the 14th century, by some acquaintances and admirers of the poet, namely Coluccio Salutati and Pier Paolo Vergerio, based on the autographed manuscript now lost.

When Petrarch was still alive, though, there were rumours that his work was in progress, and two scholars were allowed to read some sections: around 1341, in Avignon, Pierre Bersuire had access to at least part of the 3 book (specifically lines 138-264), from which he could obtain data that he in turn used in the introduction to his *Ovidius moralizatus*. In 1343, in Naples, Barbato da Sulmona transcribed a section from book 6, the soliloquy of Hannibal's brother Mago, who was about to die. Since then that passage had autonomous and vast circulation; it was even the object of some criticism about stylistic adequacy, to which in 1363 Petrarch replied in a letter to Boccaccio (*Seniles* 2,1).[7]

Even though the subject matter in the *Punica* and the *Africa* is the same, the two poems are very different from the point of view of the narrative structure: in the

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doctrine, capable of living with elegance, all devoted to the cult of Virgil, but with only one flaw: that of writing verses. Not differently, Cetrangolo (1991), 201, declares that Silius only excited the interest of some philologues keen on neutral scholarly research, but not that of those genuinely interested in real poetry (he denied that to the *Punica* could be attributed a real artistic and poetic value). Even Delz, in the introduction to his monumental critical edition of the *Punica*, expresses a negative judgment on the poem; see Delz (1987), v: «Silii edendi consilium cepi (…) non admiratione quidem poetae mediocris instinctus, sed quia editionem a Ludovico Bauer confectam fundamento parum firmo niti (…) perspexeram». Other highly critical and restrictive opinions are reported by Dominik (2010), 431-438.

[6] The new trends of criticism are focused by Dominik (2010), 440-447.

[7] The most detailed contributions concerning the genesis and fortune of the *Africa* are those of Fera (1984[1]) and Fera (1984[2]). The same Fera is working on a new critical edition: Fera (2010). Marchesi (2009) provides a synthetic and useful overview of the poem.

Punica the narration is developed in a linear way from the beginning to the end (that is coincidence of story and plot); contrariwise *Africa* starts when the Romans are about to start war in Africa after the conquest of Spain. Petrarch makes use of flashbacks and flash-forwards to relate events taking place long before and after the war itself. In this perspective the focus of the *Africa* extends beyond the second Punic war to the whole Roman history which Petrarch intended to celebrate as a model for human civilization. The complex narrative device of the *Africa* is based on typical schemes from the Latin literary tradition (namely Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis* and Vergil, *Aeneis*): that's how in the first two books of the poem, Scipio dreams about his father Publius and his uncle Gnaeus who first commemorate the Roman heroes of the past, and prophesy the future glory of Rome and its subsequent decadence.

2. A pre-discovery of Silius?

In 1781 Jean Baptiste Lefebvre de Villebrune published an edition of Silius Italicus, in which he advanced his opinion that before Poggio's discovery, Petrarch was already acquainted with the *Punica*, which he had employed in the composition of *Africa*, even to the point of plagiarising. According to Villebrune, Petrarch deliberately appropriated some passages from Silius's work (among which the famed Mago's lamentation) to include them in his new poem.[8] Christian Gottlob Heyne immediately rejected the plagiarism theory and claimed for Petrarch the authorship of Mago's lamentation; he nevertheless accepted the thesis that Petrarch was familiar with the *Punica* and that, therefore, Silius's work enjoyed a certain circulation in times preceding Poggio's discovery.[9]

The above theory did not receive much support in the nineteenth or in the early twentieth century. Among those who resolutely opposed it were de Nolhac, Schanz, von Albrecht and above all Martellotti[10]. These scholars mainly based their criticism on the absence of material evidence that Petrarch actually had at his disposal a manuscript of Silius. Furthermore, they observed that the convergence of style and subject matter between *Punica* and *Africa* may be due to the commune sources used by the two authors, in particular Titus Livius's historical work. Even in more recent

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[8] Lefebvre de Villebrune (1781), x-xi.

[9] Heyne (1782), 262.

[10] See respectively Nolhac (1907), 193 («[Pétrarque] ne soupçonnait pas, quoi qu'on ait pu dire, l'existence de Silius Italicus. Le poème des *Puniques*, qui traite à peu près le même sujet que le sien [scilicet *Africa*], l'eût sans doute découragé de célébrer en vers le premier Africain»); Schanz (1935), 530; Albrecht (1964), 118-144; Martellotti (1983).

times some scholars, such as Fera, Pacca, Petoletti and Marchesi, affirmed that Petrarch was not acquainted with the *Punica*.[11]

An interesting essay by Carlo Santini nevertheless revived the discussion around the end of the twentieth-century. Santini recomposed the terms of the old argument, contributing new comparative evidence in favour of Petrarch's awareness of Silius's poem. In his opinion both the *Africa* and the *Trionfi* show a compelling series of thematic and stylistic similarities with *Punica*.[12] Santini's stance enjoyed a remarkable credit and seems nowadays prevailing. Subsequently new elements in support of Santini's conclusions were provided by various scholars like Tedeschi, Cassata, ter Haar, Caputo, Voce and Bianchi.[13]

The contrast between the two different theses is particularly evident and palpable in a collection of essays (*Petrarca und die römische Literatur*) printed in Tübingen in 2005: two essays are published here, one after the other, concerning the same subject. In the first one Werner Schubert aims at demonstrating that we have no real evidence that Petrarch knew Silius, and that the supporting arguments carried on by Leonardus ter Haar are not convincing.[14] On the contrary, in the second one, Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer believes it is a proven fact that Petrarch knew Silius. Consequently, she tries to demonstrate that, because the name *Silius* recalls the Latin verb *silere* (i.e. 'to be silent'), Petrarch would have never explicitly mentioned the name of the ancient epic poet, but he would have alluded to him indirectly and implicitly (e.g. in *Familiares* XXIV 12,23 and in the *Bucolicum carmen*). [15] Regardless of the fact that neither Schubert nor Harich-Schwarzbauer pay much attention to the Italian essays on the subject, it is quite interesting to underline that the two contributions provide diametrically opposite views of the problem, although they are published together, in the same book, with no editorial or introductory note to clarify such a blatant contradiction.

3. Possible new explanations of some remarkable similarities

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[11] See Fera (1984²), 455; Pacca (1998), 52; Petoletti in Baglio-Nebuloni Testa-Petoletti (2006), 884-885; Marchesi (2009), 386 (note 13).

[12] Santini (1993).

[13] Tedeschi (1994); Cassata (1998); Haar (1999), xxxvi-xlvi; Caputo (2004); Voce (2008); Bianchi (2015). Further similarities have been identified by Gibertini (2012), *passim* and by Venier (2015-2016), 413-416. It should be remembered in this regard that Petrarch was credited with the knowledge of another work, the discovery of which is attributed to Poggio, namely Statius's *Silvae*: see Brugnoli (2003).

[14] Schubert (2005).

[15] Harich-Schwarzbauer (2005).

In absence of new unexpected documental evidence, it is highly probable that the question will remain open and problematic. On my part, I am not claiming to provide any ultimate conclusion. I wish to explain, though, how several pieces of evidence in support of Silius's presence in Petrarch's work are not as meaningful as they may seem, owing to the fact that Petrarch's text may in many cases be in debt to different sources older or more recent than Silius, and surely familiar to and exploited by Petrarch. In this perspective, I aim to follow a methodological line already outlined by Martellotti and later especially by Schubert, taking into account that, in this kind of analysis, for any textual coincidence to be considered effectively probative, it must be necessarily unique and not elsewhere documented.

Before providing a few, but I hope significant examples, it is worth remembering that Petrarch owned perhaps the largest and richest library of his time.[16] As well as his favourite authors of republican and imperial age (namely Cicero, Livy, Vergil, Ovid and many others), he was familiar with some later authors such as the poet Claudius Claudianus; historians, such as Lucius Florus (who summarized the work of Livy), Paulus Orosius (author of the *Historiae adversus paganos*) and Justin (who summarized the work of Pompeius Trogus). He also knew very well the encyclopedic work of Isidorus, archbishop of Seville, namely the *Etymologiae* and the works of many Fathers of the Church, particularly those of Aurelius Augustinus. All these authors will play a role in the following discussion.

As Carlo Santini noted,[17] both Silius and Petrarch recount that Hannibal, after many victories against Roman armies, arrived in sight of the city, but was removed from the walls by a terrible storm. In fact, Silius writes as follows in *Punica*, 12,674-680:

> (…) «pugnat pro moenibus», inquit,
> «si rector superum tot iactis culmine telis,
> inter tot motus cur me contra arma ferentem
> afflixisse piget? ventis hiemique fugaces
> terga damus? remeet, quaeso, mens illa vigorque,
> qua vobis, cum pacta patrum, cum foedera obessent,
> integrare acies placitum».

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[16] After the fundamental researches by Nolhac (1907), the greatest contribution to the knowledge of Petrarch's library was furnished by Billanovich: his most important essays on the subject are collected in Billanovich (1996).

[17] Santini (1993), 115-116.

«If the Ruler of the gods», said he, «is fighting in defence of Rome and hurling bolt after bolt from his high place, why, when he is so busy, is he unwilling to strike down me, his adversary? Are we to turn our backs, and be routed by winds and rough weather? Show once more, I entreat you, that firmness of purpose with which you resolved to fight a second war, in spite of treaties and of the covenants of our senate» (transl. by Duff [1961]).

Petrarch, in turn, writes in *Africa*, 6,539-543:

Nec tamen armorum, coepti nec paenitet: urbis
moenia conspexi armatus latebrisque coegi
tot claros latitare duces. Iam nempe notare
fulminibus nimbisque tuam tunc, Iupiter, iram,
si mens sana foret, poteram.

No exercise of war I regret: / I've seen proud cities' walls with arms arrayed, / I've forced great captains many a time to skulk / in hiding. Had I then, great Jupiter, / been sane, I should at once have recognized / in bolts and storms the tokens of your wrath (transl. by Bergin-Wilson [1977])

The similarity between the two texts does not derive from the use of a common source, that is Livy, because Livy talks about Hannibal's appearance in front of the *moenia Romae*, but he does not mention the prodigious storm, which would have turned the enemies away.[18] Is it mandatory therefore to think that Petrarch was inspired here by Silius? I would not think so. The narration of the storm is witnessed by other authors surely known by Petrarch, first of all Florus in his *Epitoma de Tito Livio*, 1.59 (*olim* 2. 6. 44):[19]

Quid ergo miramur moventi castra a tertio lapide Hannibali iterum ipsos deos – deos inquam, nec fateri pudebit – restitisse? tanta enim ad singulos illius motus vis imbrium effusa est, tanta ventorum violentia coorta est, ut

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[18] See e.g. Liv. 26. 41. 12 (P. Scipio is talking): «Adde defectionem Italiae maioris partis, Siciliae, Sardiniae; adde ultimum terrorem ac pavorem, castra Punica inter Anienem ac moenia Romana posita et visum prope in portis victorem Hannibalem»; and see also 30. 21. 6-8: «Mentio deinde ab senioribus facta est segnius homines bona quam mala sentire: transitu in Italiam Hannibalis quantum terroris pavorisque esset meminisse; quas deinde clades, quos luctus incidisse! [7] visa castra hostium e muris urbis; quae vota singulorum universorumque fuisse! quotiens in conciliis voces manus ad caelum porgentium auditas, [8] en unquam ille dies futurus esset quo vacuam hostibus Italiam bona pace florentem visuri essent!».

[19] Petrarch could read the *Epitome* in the current manuscript Paris, lat. 5690, which contains, in the order, the *Ephemeris belli Troiani*, Florus and Livy (decades 1, 3 and 4); the code, which belonged first to Landolfo Colonna and later to Petrarch (Billanovich [1996], 83), was studied especially in relation to the text of Livy: Reeve (1987), 410.

> divinitus hostem submoveri non a caelo, sed ab urbis ipsius moenibus et Capitolio videretur. Itaque fugit et cessit et in ultimum se Italiae recepit sinum, cum urbem tantum non adoratam reliquisset.

Why then are we surprised that, when Hannibal was moving his camp forward from the third milestone, the gods, the gods I say (and we shall feel no shame in admitting their aid), again resisted his progress? For, at each advance of his, such a flood of rain fell and such violent gales arose that he seemed to be repelled by the gods not from heaven, but from the walls of the city, itself and the Capitol. Hannibal fled and departed, withdrawing to the furthermost corner of Italy, abandoning the city, the object almost of his worship (transl. by Forster [1929]).

But that extraordinary event is also mentioned by Augustine, in *De civitate Dei*, 3.20:

> Si ipsi dii tempestate atque fulminibus Hannibalem postea Romanis proximum moenibus terruerunt longeque miserunt, tunc primum tale aliquid facerent. *Audeo* quippe dicere honestius illos pro amicis Romanorum ideo periclitantibus, ne Romanis frangerent fidem, et nullam opem tunc habentibus quam pro ipsis Romanis, qui pro se pugnabant atque adversus Hannibalem opulenti erant, potuisse tempestate saevire.

If it really was the gods who later, when Hannibal was at the very walls of Rome, terrified him with lightning and storm and drove him far away, they certainly should have done the same on the earlier occasion. Indeed, it would, I venture to observe, have redounded more to their honour had they been able to produce a raging storm on behalf of the friends of the Romans who were in peril for not breaking faith with the Romans and who at that time had no succour, rather than on behalf of the Romans themselves, who were fighting on their own behalf and who were well provided with resources against Hannibal (transl. by Dyson [1998]).

Of course, Augustine does not trust the tradition according to which the Romans were saved by pagan Gods. However, what matters is that also Augustine, in a work favoured by Petrarch since his youth, transmits the story of the tempest. This is a strong additional reason to believe that in this case the similarities between *Punica* and *Africa* do not imply a direct dependence of one from the other.

Both Santini and Caputo observed that Petrarch describes Scipio Africanus characterizing him in a manner similar to that used by Silius Italicus. In the opinion of the two Italian scholars, the portrait of Scipio made by Silius had a great influence on Petrarch, in the composition not only of the *Africa*, but also of the *Trionfi*, his last

and unfinished vulgar poem.[20] Silius imagines that Scipio Africanus, during a speech, puts in contrast personified destructive vices, such as Pleasure, Drunkenness and Luxury, to as many personified virtues, such as Honor, Praise, and Renown (*Punica*, 15,94-100):

> quippe nec ira deum tantum nec tela nec hostes,
> quantum sola noces animis illapsa, Voluptas.
> Ebrietas tibi foeda comes, tibi Luxus et atris
> circa te semper volitans Infamia pennis;
> mecum Honor ac Laudes et laeto Gloria vultu
> et Decus ac niveis Victoria concolor alis.
> me cinctus lauro producit ad astra Triumphus.

For neither the wrath of heaven nor the attacks of foemen are as fatal as Pleasure alone when she infects the mind. She brings with her an ugly train, Drunkenness and Luxury; and dark-winged Disgrace ever hovers round her. My attendants are Honor and Praise, Renown and Glory with joyful countenance, and Victory with snow-white wings like mine (transl. by Duff [1961]).

Also in *Africa* we find a very similar contrast, in this case between virtues and vices, precisely in the second book, where Petrarch imagines that Scipio Africanus, during a dream, listens to his father, Publius Cornelius Scipio, prophesying the future victory against Hannibal. Cornelius Scipio speaks these words to his son (*Africa*, 2,63-69):

> hinc virtus obiecta malis cultusque modesti
> et pudor et benesuada fides pietasque comesque
> iustitia et reliquae vibrabunt arma Sorores;
> Inde furor, dolus et rabies et nescia veri
> pectora contemptusque dei fervensque libido
> caecaque perpetuis crescens sub litibus ira
> et scelerum species horrendae et nomina multa.

On our side / see Virtue, foe of Evil, modest Honor, / Decorum, suasive Faith and Piety / and Justice with her sisters all in arms; / on their side mark you Fury, Frenzy, Fraud, / hearts deaf to truth, Contempt of God, and Lust / unbridled, Wrath that grows and swells with strife / incessant and dire semblances and Crime / in all its forms» (transl. by Bergin-Wilson [1977]).

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[20] Santini (1993), 137-138; Caputo (2004), 123-124.

Of course, it is possible to put into focus a great similarity between the two quoted passages, since both are based on the figure of speech called *antithesis*. However, differently from Santini and Caputo, I do not observe a direct connection between the texts. It is highly probable, in fact, that Petrarch was inspired, in this case, by a passage from a work deeply studied and frequently quoted during the Middle Ages, namely the *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri* by Isidore of Seville, particularly 2. 21.5:

> Antitheta, quae Latine contraposita appellantur: quae, dum ex adverso ponuntur, sententiae pulchritudinem faciunt, et in ornamento locutionis decentissima existunt, ut Cicero: «ex hac parte pudor pugnat, illinc petulantia; hinc pudicitia, illinc stuprum; hinc fides, illinc fraudatio; hinc pietas, illinc scelus; hinc constantia, illinc furor; hinc honestas, illinc turpitudo; hinc continentia, illinc libido; hinc denique aequitas, temperantia, fortitudo, prudentia, virtutes omnes certant cum iniquitate, luxuria, ignavia, temeritate, cum vitiis omnibus; postremo copia cum egestate; bona ratio cum perdita; mens sana cum amentia; bona denique spes cum omnium rerum desperatione confligit». In huiusmodi certamine ac proelio, huiusmodi locutionis ornamento liber Ecclesiasticus usus est, dicens: «contra malum bonum, et contra mortem vita: sic contra pium peccator: et sic intuere in omnia opera altissimi, bina et bina, unum contra unum».

Antitheses (antitheton) are called 'oppositions' (contrapositum) in Latin. When these are set in opposition they make for beauty of expression, and among the ornaments of speech they remain the most lovely, as Cicero (*Catiline Oration* 2,25): «On this side shame does battle; on that, impudence; here modesty, there debauchery; here faith, there deceit; here piety, there wickedness; here steadiness, there rage; here decency, there foulness; here restraint, there lust; here in short equity, temperance, courage, wisdom, all the virtues struggle with iniquity, dissipation, cowardice, fool hardiness – with all the vices. Finally wealth struggles against poverty, right thinking against depravity, sanity against madness – in sum, good hope against desperation in every circumstance». In strife and battle oft his kind the book of *Ecclesiasticus* used the ornament of this type of locution, saying (*cf.* 33,15): «Good is set against evil, and life against death; so also is the sinner against a just man. And so look upon all the works of the most High. Two and two, and one against another» (transl. by Barney-Lewis-Beach-Berghof [2006]).

In fact, the language used by Petrarch shows many and remarkable analogies with the passage taken from *Etymologiae* (*fides*, *pietas*, *furor*, *libido* are words which occur both in the *Etymologiae* and in *Africa*, not in the passage taken from

Punica). Therefore, there are more and more compelling reasons to think that also in this case Petrarch derived his narration not from the *Punica*, but from another source, in this case the *Etymologiae*, a work that surely was at his disposal and was by him rigorously studied.[21]

A further argument in favour of the hypothesis that Petrarch knew the *Punica* has been proposed by Antonella Tedeschi:[22] she has noted that both in *Punica* and in *Africa* Scipio Africanus is described as the warlord avenging the death of his father and his uncle, who died fighting in Spain. In fact, there is an undeniable and striking resemblance between *Punica*, 7,487-490:

> hinc ille in furto genitus patruique piabit
> idem ultor patrisque necem; tum litus Elissae
> implebit flammis avelletque Itala Poenum
> viscera torrentem et propriis superabit in oris.

Next the offspring of stolen love shall duly avenge his father and his uncle as well; then he shall spread fire over the coast of Dido, and tear Hannibal away from the vitals of Italy on which he is preying, and defeat him in his own country (transl. by Duff [1961]).

and *Africa*, 1,145-151:

> Urgebat vindicta patris pietasque movebat
> ut coeptum sequeretur opus. Nam sanguine saevo
> caesorum cineresque sacros umbrasque parentum
> placari, atque Itala detergi fronte pudorem,
> hic amor assiduum pulsabat pectora clari
> Scipiadae, in frontem eliciens oculosque iuventa
> fulgentes calido generosas corde favillas.

Revenge and filial love moved Scipio / to carry on the task he had begun / and by horrendous slaughter to appease / the sacred ashes of ancestors slain / and cleanse of shame the face of Italy. / This was the lasting hope that fed the heart / of noble Scipio; upon his brow / and his shining youthful glance there gleamed / the glorious flame that burned within his breast (transl. by Bergin-Wilson [1977]).

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[21] Petrarch read and studied the *Etymologiae* in the current ms. Paris, lat. 7595, which was purchased by his father, Ser Petracco: Billanovich (1996), 18-19, 318-319; the *Etymologiae* are widely quoted by Petrarch in the marginal notes to the Ambrosian Vergil: Baglio-Nebuloni Testa-Petoletti (2006), *ad indicem*.

[22] Tedeschi (1994).

In addition, Tedeschi noted that in the poem, still in perfect analogy with the *Punica*, Scipio is often called *ultor*, that is 'avenger'. Like Silius, also Petrarch reaffirms the mission of Scipio as the avenger of his father and uncle, and, more generally, of Rome (e.g. *Africa*, 4,248 *Tum filius, ultor / et patris et patrui, nomen dedit*). In reality, even in this case it is easy to point at much more plausible sources than Silius Italicus, namely, again, Florus, who always portraits Scipio Africanus as the avenger of his father and uncle. In fact, Florus writes as follows in *Epitoma*, 1.58 (*olim* 2. 6. 37):

> Igitur in ultionem patris ac patrui missus cum exercitu Scipio, cui iam grande de Africa nomen fata decreverant (…).

And so a third Scipio, for whom the fate had already destined a great name to be won in Africa, was sent with an army to avenge his father and uncle (transl. by Forster [1929]).

And in *Epitoma*, 1.78 (*olim* 2.17.7):

> Igitur quasi novam integramque provinciam ultor patris et patrui Scipio ille mox Africanus invasit, isque statim capta Carthagine et aliis urbibus, non contentus Poenos expulisse, stipendiariam nobis provinciam fecit, omnes citra ultraque Hiberum subiecit imperio primusque Romanorum ducum victor ad Gades et Oceani ora pervenit.

And so, that other Scipio, afterwards to be known as Africanus, coming to avenge his father and uncle, entered as it were a new and unimpaired province. After immediately capturing Carthage (i.e. Nova Carthage) and other cities, not content with having expelled the Carthaginians, he made Spain into a province paying tribute to Rome, and subdued all the inhabitants on both sides of the Iberus, and was the first Roman general to reach Gades and the shores of the Ocean as a conqueror (transl. by Forster [1929]).

Furthermore, also Orosius in his *Historiarum adversum paganos libri* (4. 18.1) speaks of Scipio as the avenger of his father and uncle:

> Scipio annos natus viginti et quattuor imperium in Hispaniam proconsulare sortitus, ultionem praecipue patris et patrui animo intendens, Pyrenaeum transgressus primo impetu Carthaginem Novam cepit (…).

When Scipio was twenty-four, after obtaining the command of proconsul in Spain, having in his mind the desire to avenge his father and uncle, passed the Pyrenees and, at the first assault, conquered the New Carthage (my transl.).

It is not obviously possible to report all the arguments in favour of the hypothesis that Petrarch knew Silius's *Punica*, and consequently that Silius's poem had a circulation before Poggio's discovery. It is enough for me, though, to point out the weakness of such arguments: many similarities between the *Punica* and the *Africa* can be clarified and justified without hypothesizing Petrarch's dependence on Silius's poem.

Last but not least, it must be remembered that Petrarch used to annotate his manuscripts commenting and comparing the authors he was reading. In his notes, studied and edited since the beginning of the twentieth century, never occurs a quotation of Silius Italicus (or at least: to date, no scholar has detected such a quotation). As we have already noted, Petrarch never explicitly quotes Silius even in his works, Latin or vulgar. The explanation given by Harich-Schwarzbauer to justify such silence seems to me quite artificial.[23] This silence undoubtedly weighs in favour of the conclusion that Petrarch had never known the *Punica*.

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[23] In fact, Harich-Schwarzbauer assumes that the name of Silius was well known to Petrarch (and to the culture of his era). At least in the first humanistic period it was, on the contrary, vastly unknown and misunderstood, so much that it is misspelled by Francis Barbaro in the quoted letter to Poggio: «Tu Tertullianum, tu M. Fabium Quintilianum, tu Q. Asconium Pedianum, tu Lucretium, Sylum [*sic!*] Italicum, (…) tu complures alios, (…) fato functos vita donastis».

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Abstract: as far as we know from the available historical documentation, the poem *Punica* by Silius Italicus (a Latin epic poet who lived in the first century a.D.) had no circulation during the Middle Ages, and it was discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417. In the opinion of many scholars, however, Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) would have known the *Punica* about eighty years before Poggio's discovery, and he would have imitated it in his poem *Africa*. As matter of fact, Petrarca's *Africa* shows surprising similarities with *Punica*. In my research, I inspect some passages of the two poems and I elucidate that the similarities between the two works may be casual: at least in those examined passages, *Africa* depends on other different sources, with which Petrarca was surely acquainted.

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