

NATURE, LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY IN SILIUS ITALICUS’ ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE AT THE TREBIA*

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the fight between the river Trebia and Scipio the Elder in Silius Italicus’ Punica (4.525–703), notoriously based on the Homeric battle between Achilles and Scamander (Il. 21.1–382). By means of a close reading of the geographical details of Silius’ account, this article aims at highlighting the peculiar role given to the landscape in this episode. By intertwining well-established epic topoi and historiographical reflections, the poet imbues Italy’s landscape with a profound ideological meaning. His depiction of the natural environment thematizes key issues relating to the Second Punic War, such as the disruptive effects of Hannibal’s invasion on the bond between Italian communities, the problematic nature of shared Italian identity, and the contagious nature of rebellion.

Keywords: Silius Italicus; *Punica*; Livy; the river Trebia; Homer; Scipio; Second Punic War

In the last few decades, the importance of nature and landscape in the ideological construction of the *Punica* has drawn increasing scholarly attention. Critics have highlighted how Silius employs natural elements to develop specific aspects of his narrative¹ or to engage with contemporary political issues, such as Roman expansionism.² In an insightful study, C. Santini identified an ‘ecological’ sensibility behind Silius’

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¹ Cf. P.H. Schrijvers, ‘Silius Italicus and the Roman sublime’, in R.R. Nauta, H.-J. van Dam and J.J.L. Smolenaars (edd.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden, 2006), 97–111; E. Manolaraki, ‘Silius’ natural history: tides in the *Punica*’, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Silius Italicus* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 293–321; H. Haselmann, *Gewässer als Schauplätze und Akteure in den Punica des Silius Italicus* (Münster, 2018).

² A.A. Kozak, ‘Nature, imperialism, and the ethics of war in Flavian epic’ (Diss., Univ. of Illinois, 2020). Geopoetics has been especially investigated in Statius, often in relation to the centre–periphery dialectic: see e.g. C. Newlands, ‘Statius and Ovid: transforming the landscape’, *TAPhA* 134 (2004), 133–55; R. Parkes, ‘The long road to Thebes: the geography of journeys in Statius’ *Thebaid*’, in M. Skempis and I. Ziogas (edd.), *Geography, Topography, Landscape: Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 405–26; R. Pogorzelski, ‘Centers and peripheries’, in A. Zissos (ed.), *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome* (Chichester, 2016), 223–38; F. Cannizzaro, ‘Dal Reno al Tevere. Poetica e politica fluviale nelle *Silvae* di Stazio’, in M.L. Delvigo (ed.), *Centro e periferia nella letteratura latina di Roma imperiale* (Udine, 2021), 219–34; C.M. Chinn, ‘Empire and Italian landscape in Statius: *Silvae* 4.3 and 4.5’, in M. Horster and N. Hächler (edd.), *The Impact of the Roman Empire on Landscapes* (Leiden and Boston, 2022), 353–71. On Valerius Flaccus, see e.g. H. Slaney, ‘The voyage of rediscovery: consuming global space in Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*’, in M. Skempis and I. Ziogas (edd.), *Geography*,

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treatment of natural environment.³ His recurrent use of natural imagery stresses the disruptive effects of the Hannibalic War on the natural ecosystem. As a result, the human conflict is projected onto a cosmic level and acquires the traits of a sacrilegious violation. On the other hand, nature itself intervenes in the narrative as an active participant, using its power to oppose human endeavours. As expected, this antagonism especially involves Hannibal, whose expedition is repeatedly represented as an act of *hubris* against nature, most notably when he crosses natural boundaries that bear clear symbolic significance, such as the Pyrenees and the Alps.⁴ Silius, however, seems to convey the idea that war intrinsically represents a threat to the natural order and therefore an impious act. This is especially evident in the image of the waters of Italy polluted by the slaughter of war, which Silius employs frequently throughout his poem and for rather different purposes.⁵

This article will focus on one of the most remarkable instances of the fluvial ‘styleme’ in the poem: the battle at the Trebia, when the river, angry at being disrupted in its flow, attacks Scipio the Elder, only to be repelled by Vulcan’s intervention (4.573–703). The episode, famously modelled on Homer’s account of the battle between Achilles and Scamander (*Il.* 21.1–382),⁶ illustrates Silius’ use of natural–ecological imagery to explore ideological issues related to the Second Punic War, most notably the problem of Rome’s national identity. It will be argued that Silius assigns nature an active role precisely in order to highlight the disruptive effects of Hannibal’s war in relation to Italian identities and the integrity of Rome’s relationship with the Italian land. In order to do so, the poet actively engages with well-established and conventional topoi, such as the bloody river, and imbues them with new meanings, reactivating their most profound ideological implications.

The first reference to the battle at the Trebia and to the water pollution imagery is found as early as Juno’s proemial prophecy. From the very onset of the poem, the goddess envisions the sufferings that await the Romans by evoking their four major defeats by the rivers Ticinus, Trebia and Aufidus (Cannae), and at Lake Trasimene. In this horrific water landscape, natural elements reflect and symbolize the violence waged against Rome (1.42–54):

‘intulerit Latio spreta me Troius’ inquit
‘exul Dardanium et, bis numina capta, penates
sceptraque fundarit uictor Lauinia Teucris,
dum Romana tuae, Ticine, cadauera ripae
non capiant, Simoisque mihi per Celtica rura
sanguine Pergameo Trebia et stipantibus armis
corporibusque uirum retro fluat ac sua largo

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Topography, Landscape: Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 427–61.

³ C. Santini, *Silius Italicus and his View of the Past* (Amsterdam, 1991), 63–113.

⁴ See Santini (n. 3), 94–7 and, on the Pyrenees, A. Augoustakis, ‘*Lugendam formae sine uirginitate reliquit*: reading Pyrene and the transformation of landscape in Silius’ *Punica* 3’, *AJPh* 124 (2003), 235–57.

⁵ Santini (n. 3); Haselmann (n. 1), 155–74 and 181–5.

⁶ For a close comparison of the two episodes, see especially H. Juhnke, *Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit. Untersuchungen zu Szenennachbildungen und Strukturentsprechungen in Statius’ Thebais und Achilleis und in Silius’ Punica* (Munich, 1972), 13–24; Santini (n. 3), 80–91; P. Chaudhuri, *The War with God. Theomachy in Roman Imperial Poetry* (Oxford, 2014), 205–10; Haselmann (n. 1), 174–218; further bibliography in R. Marks, *From Republic to Empire. Scipio Africanus in the Punica of Silius Italicus* (Frankfurt, 2005), 140 n. 74.

stagna reformidet Thrasymennus turbida tabo,
 dum Cannas, tumulum Hesperiae, campumque cruore 50
 Ausonio mersum sublimis lapyga cernam
 teque uadi dubium coeuntibus, Aufide, ripis
 per clipeos galeasque uirum caesosque per artus
 uix iter Hadriaci rumpentem ad litora ponti.⁷

‘The Trojan exile Aeneas spurned me’, she said. ‘He brought into Latium Troy and the Penates, the household gods that already were captured twice. The conqueror founded a kingdom at Lavinium for the Trojans. Let him have done this—so long as the banks of the River Ticinus shall not have room for the Roman corpses. The River Trebia, a Simois for me through the Celtic countryside, shall flow backward in Trojan blood, blocked by men’s weapons and bodies. Lake Trasimene shall shrink back in fear at its own pools, disturbed from great carnage. So long as I shall look down on high at the battlefield of Cannae, Italy’s grave, and the lapygian plains drowned in Roman blood. The River Aufidus, doubtful of its course, its banks drawn together, shall hardly be able to break its way through to the Adriatic shores as it passes through men’s shields and helmets and slashed limbs.’

Roman poets inherited the Homeric motif of the bloody river well before Silius⁸ and further developed it, not only with reference to the Trojan episode but also as a rather standard feature in the poetic stylization of war,⁹ to the point of treating it as ‘an emblem of the grand heroics of epic’.¹⁰ If we accept Delz’s excellent correction *Simoisque* for the transmitted *similisque* at line 46,¹¹ Silius declares his indebtedness to this tradition from the first occurrence of the imagery and anticipates his reworking of Homer in Book 4 of the *Punica*. The passage, however, is more generally revealing of his conscious use of geospatial references in the construction of his poem.¹² Juno’s first words stress the superimposition of Troy’s geography onto the Italian landscape (*intulerit Latio ... Dardaniam*) and place her revenge within the framework of a dynamic of almost cause and effect: since Aeneas has dared to bring Dardania into Latium, Juno will fight the Romans by pushing this geographical short-circuit to its most nefarious consequences, that is, by transferring the Simois into the fields of Gaul (*Simoisque ...*

⁷ All passages from Silius are quoted from J. Delz (ed.), *Sili Italici Punica* (Stuttgart, 1987), with the translation of A. Augoustakis and N.W. Bernstein, *Silius Italicus’ Punica. Rome’s War with Hannibal* (London and New York, 2021), the latter with occasional changes.

⁸ As early as Accius’ *Epinausimache*: 322–3 Ribbeck³; cf. Catull. 64.357–60; Verg. *Aen.* 5.806–10 (see below); Sen. *Tro.* 187, *Ag.* 213–14.

⁹ See e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 6.87 (the Sibyl’s prophecy), 9.456, 11.393–4, 12.35–6; Ov. *Tr.* 4.2.42; Luc. 2.209–20, 7.116, 7.537, 7.700, 7.789–90, 8.33–4, 10.32–3 (see N. Lanzarone, *Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis Liber VII* [Florence, 2016], 188–9); Stat. *Theb.* 3.211.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Mader, ‘That st(r)ain again: blood, water, and generic allusion in Horace’s Bandusia ode’, *AJPh* 123 (2002), 51–9, at 56. The blood-stained river is sometimes evoked as a defining motif of martial epic, as opposed to other genres: see Prop. 3.3.45–6, with P. Fedeli, *Properzio: Il libro terzo delle Elegie* (Bari, 1985), 151 ad loc.; cf. the depiction of the Civil Wars found in Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.33–6, with R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book II* (Oxford, 1978), 26–7 and 28.

¹¹ J. Delz, ‘Die erste Junoszene in den *Punica* des Silius Italicus’, *MH* 26 (1969), 88–100, at 97–9; then in his Teubner edition (Delz [n. 7]). The conjecture is further supported by Haselmann (n. 1), 163–5. For alternative, less tempting solutions, see P. Miniconi and G. Devallet (edd.), *Silius Italicus, La guerre punique*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1979), ad loc.; F. Spaltenstein, *Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus (livres 1 à 8)* (Geneva, 1986), ad loc.

¹² On Silius’ interest in geographical erudition, see J. Nicol, *The Historical and Geographical Sources Used by Silius Italicus* (Oxford, 1936), 129–74; Santini (n. 3), 64–7; I. Bona, *La visione geografica nei Punica di Silio Italico* (Genoa, 1998).

per Celtica rura).¹³ This geographical perspective ties Rome to her Trojan past, representing the imminent conflict as another Trojan War.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, this comparison between Troy's and Italy's river landscapes must be read against Virgil's similar treatment in the *Aeneid*. In the prophecy of the Sybil in Book 6, the war of the Trojans against Turnus is represented as a renewal of the sufferings that they had to endure in their homeland, through a comparison between the Tiber swollen with blood and the Simois as well as the Scamander.¹⁵

A closer examination of these antecedents reveals that Silius lays the foundation of the later battle narrative by consciously reworking the geographical details found in his models. In the Homeric *machē parapotamios* 'battle beside the river', Xanthus/Scamander rages against Achilles for obstructing its stream with slaughtered bodies and preventing it from flowing into the sea (*Il.* 21.218–20).¹⁶ Xanthus' complaint, however, could not obviously be attributed to the Trebia, which is a tributary of the Po River and does not flow into the sea. The need for a geographically sound depiction explains why Silius departs from Homer by having the Trebia flow backwards (another standard *adynaton*, especially associated with the Second Punic War),¹⁷ instead of saying that it has been prevented from reaching the sea. In the context of this adaptation, the comparison with the Simois—itsself, as noted by critics,¹⁸ a tributary of the Xanthus—would be particularly apt, as it would meet Silius' desire for a certain degree of topographical realism without betraying Homer's narrative, where the Simois does play a part. Indeed, the Xanthus appeals to its 'beloved brother' (21.308 φίλε κασίγνητε), just before the final attack waged against Achilles. In this respect too Silius closely follows Virgil, who establishes a precise correspondence between the Tiber–Numicus pair and the Scamander–Simois one.¹⁹

The image of the obstructed river mouth, however, is not absent from Juno's prophecy. It is associated with the river of Cannae, the Aufidus, which 'can hardly force

¹³ I follow Delz (n. 11), 98 in taking *per Celtica rura* to refer to *Simois* rather than to *Trebia*. On the transfer of Trojan river landscape into Silius' Italy, see Haselmann (n. 1), 165–6.

¹⁴ R.T. Ganiban, 'Virgil's Dido and the heroism of Hannibal in Silius' *Punica*', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 73–98, at 79–80.

¹⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 6.87–9 *et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno. | non Simois tibi nec Xanthus nec Dorica castra | defuerint*; see also Venus' prayer to Jupiter at *Aen.* 10.60–1, with S.J. Harrison, *Virgil Aeneid 10* (Oxford, 1991), ad loc.; in other passages the corpses floating in the Simois are used as a symbol of the Trojan War as a whole: *Aen.* 1.100–1, 11.255–8. On the role of the Simois in shaping the geography of the *Aeneid*, see especially G. Bonamente, s.v. 'Simoenta', *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 4.871–2.

¹⁶ *Il.* 21.218–20 πλήθει γὰρ δὴ μοι νεκρῶν ἐρατεινὰ ῥέεθρα, | οὐδὲ τί πη δύναμαι προχέειν ῥόον εἰς ὕλα δῖαν | στεινόμενος νεκύεσσι, σὺ δὲ κτείνεις ἀϊδῆλως, 'for the loveliness of my waters is crammed with corpses, I cannot find a channel to cast my waters into the bright sea since I am congested with the dead men you kill so brutally'. All translations from the *Iliad* are by R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, republished with new notes by R. Martin (Chicago, 2011). The same situation is recalled in Virgil's brief reference to the *machē*, in *Aen.* 5.806–10 *cum ... gementque repleti | amnes, nec reperire uiam atque euoluere posset | in mare se Xanthus*.

¹⁷ This is recorded as an effect of the earthquake which occurred during the battle at Lake Trasimene: Coel. *apud* Cic. *Diu.* 1.78 (*FRHist* 15 F 14b); Livy 22.5.8. For other instances of the image as a rhetorical *adynaton* (most notably Ov. *Met.* 13.324 *ante retro Simois fluet*), see A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890 [repr. Hildesheim, 1962]), s.v. *flumen* 5.

¹⁸ Delz (n. 11), 99; Haselmann (n. 1), 165.

¹⁹ Cf. Serv. *Aen.* 6.88; on this, see especially E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro, Aeneis Buch VI* (Darmstadt, 1957⁴), 150; N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 6. A Commentary* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 124–5 with bibliography; Haselmann (n. 1), 166.

a passage to the Adriatic shore through shields and helmets and severed limbs of men' (1.53–4). As noted by Santini,²⁰ this shift appears particularly appropriate in the light of the historical tradition. In the famous *carmen Marcianum*, the prophecy announcing Rome's defeat at Cannae that was discovered four years after the battle (212 B.C.E.), the slaughter of the Romans is visually embodied by the corpses dragged into the Adriatic Sea (Livy 25.12.5–6):

amnem, Troiugena, fuge Cannam, ne te alienigenae cogant in campo Diomedis conserere manus. sed neque credes tu mihi, donec compleris sanguine campum, multaque milia occisa tua deferet amnis in pontum magnum ex terra frugifera.

Child of Troy, flee the River Canna, lest men from abroad force you to do battle on Diomedes' plain. But you will not believe me until you have filled the plain with blood, and the river bears your dead in many thousands from fertile land to the great sea.²¹

The suggestion provided by the *carmen*, moreover, allows Silius to rework Virgil, who refers to the Aufidus flowing backwards in Turnus' speech at *Aen.* 11.405 (*amnis et Hadriacas retro fugit Aufidus undas*), a passage clearly echoed in Silius' wording: 54 *uix iter Hadriaci rumpentem ad litora ponti* (note the identical metrical position of the adjective and the two nouns denoting the sea).

As mentioned before, this complex geographical construction prepares the reader for the narrative of the battle at the Trebia (4.525–703). Silius' reworking of Homer in this episode is fully consistent with the reshaping of Troy's geography in Juno's proemial prophecy. When the Trebia attacks the elder Scipio, it accuses the consul of causing it to overflow (rather than of preventing it from flowing into the sea): 4.663–4 *clipeis galeisque uirorum, | quos mactas, artatus iter cursumque reliqui*, 'the helmets and shields of the men you slaughtered have blocked my path, and I have left my course'. Moreover, in Scipio's rebuttal to the river the role given to the sea in the *Iliad* is assigned to the Po instead: 4.646–7 *nec tangere ripas | illabique Pado dabitur*, 'nor will you be allowed to touch any banks or flow into the River Po'.²²

On the other hand, Silius' concern with geographical details is far from being a mere display of erudition or literary embellishment. As has been observed, it is part of a precise narrative strategy of 'geographical distancing',²³ meant to raise historical and ideological issues that are central to the interpretation of the poem as a whole. In the Trebia episode, Scipio's threats to the river are meant to problematize the superimposition of Troy's geography onto the landscape of the Hannibalic War and, thus, the role assigned to the characters in this episode. When attacked, Scipio threatens to obliterate the river's very existence, by dispersing it through the surrounding fields (4.643–8):

'magnas, o Trebia, et meritas mihi, perfide, poenas
exsolues' inquit. 'lacerum per Gallica riuus

²⁰ Santini (n. 3), 72.

²¹ All translations from Livy are taken from J.C. Yardley and D. Hoyos, *Livy: Hannibal's War, Books 21–30* (Oxford and New York, 2006).

²² Cf. 4.633–4 *turgentia membra | Eridano Trebia, Eridanus dedit aequoris undis*, 'the River Trebia handed his swollen limbs on to the River Po, and the Po gave them to the ocean waves'; Hom. *Il.* 21.124–5 Σκάμανδρος | οἷσαι δινήεις εἶσω ἄλως εὐρέα κόλπον, 'eddying Scamander will carry you into the broad gulf of the sea'.

²³ See W.J. Dominik, 'Civil war, parricide, and the sword in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, in L. Donovan Ginsberg and D.A. Krasne (edd.), *After 69 CE: Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome* (Berlin and Boston, 2018), 271–93, at 275 (with bibliography).

dispergam rura atque amnis tibi nomina demam,
 quoque aperis te fonte, premam, nec tangere ripas
 illabique Pado dabitur. quanam ista repente
 Sidonium, infelix, rabies te reddidit amnem?

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... and he said: 'O Trebia, you traitor, great and well deserved are the penalties you will pay to me. I will cut you into channels and spread you through the Gallic fields. I will take the name of river away from you. Wherever your source opens, I will block it, nor will you be allowed to touch any banks or flow into the River Po. You wretch, what is this madness that suddenly made you a Carthaginian river?'

Scipio's words greatly complicate the picture presented to the reader and reveal how the memory of Homer's *machē parapotamios* is meant to blur the boundaries between invaders and defendants and to raise questions about identity, ethnicity and loyalty. From the onset, the wording stresses the reversal of Juno's prophecy: the dispersion of the Trebia *per Gallica ... rura* (4.644–5), rather than being caused by the slaughter of the Roman forces (as in Juno's speech at 1.46), is the object of an impious threat to a river god.²⁴ This undeniably puts Scipio in the position of the aggressor, the position that in the *Iliad* belongs to Achilles, but his almost hubristic behaviour is matched by a more troubling role reversal. In the consul's view, by revolting against the Romans the Trebia has betrayed its own homeland and become a *Sidonius amnis* (4.647–8).²⁵ Even before it is made explicit, the Trebia's ethnic shift is anticipated by the reference to its *perfidia* (4.643), the defining trait of the Carthaginian *ēthos* in Silius' poem and in Roman propaganda more generally, from the first annalists onwards.²⁶ Further emphasis is given to the term by means of the bucolic diaeresis, which isolates the alliterating clause *perfidie poenas*. It may be wondered whether *poenas* conceals a paronomastic allusion to *Poenus*, as attested by wordplays found in Plautus and Augustine.²⁷ Interestingly, the term recurs a little later in Trebia's rebuttal against Scipio, when the river turns the accusation of betrayal back on the consul, calling him *inimicus*: 4.660–2 *poenasne superbas | insuper et nomen Trebiae delere minaris, | o regnis inimice meis?* 'are you threatening an arrogant punishment on top of what you have already done? To remove Trebia's name, you enemy of my kingdom?'²⁸

²⁴ On Scipio's ambiguous moral stance in this episode, see Santini (n. 3), 82–5 (*contra* Juhnke [n. 6], 17); Marks (n. 6), 140–1, emphasizing Scipio's excessive *furor*; Chaudhuri (n. 6), 208–9, who, however, considers Scipio's attitude to the river somewhat justified; for a more 'optimistic' view, see Haselmann (n. 1), 185–92.

²⁵ Chaudhuri (n. 6), 208. The Trebia's culpability is also stressed by Juhnke (n. 6), 17 and 23.

²⁶ See Kozak (n. 2), 144. On Hannibal's lack of *fides* in the *Punica*, see J.-F. Thomas, 'Le thème de la perfidie carthaginoise dans l'œuvre de Silius Italicus', *Vita Latina* 161 (2001), 2–14; A.J. Pomeroy, 'Fides in Silius Italicus' *Punica*', in F. Schaffernath (ed.), *Silius Italicus. Akten der Innsbrucker Tagung vom 19.–21. Juni 2008* (Frankfurt, 2010), 59–76; C. Stocks, *The Roman Hannibal. Remembering the Enemy in Silius Italicus' Punica* (Liverpool, 2014), 86 and 106; M. Fucecchi, 'Hannibal as (anti-)hero of *fides* in Silius' *Punica*', in A. Augoustakis, E. Buckley and C. Stocks (edd.), *Fides in Flavian Literature* (Toronto, 2019), 187–207. See also C. Stocks, 'Broken bonds. Perfidy and the discourse of civil war', in A. Augoustakis, E. Buckley and C. Stocks (edd.), *Fides in Flavian Literature* (Toronto, 2019), 21–44, at 28–9.

²⁷ Plaut. *Cist.* 202 *ut uobis uicti Poeni poenas sufferant*; August. *C. Iul. imp.* 6.18 *poenas potius fuge, non Poenos*; 6.23, with D. Weber, "'For what is so monstrous as what the Punic fellow says?'. Reflections on the literary background of Julian's polemical attacks on Augustine's homeland', in P.-Y. Fux, J.-M. Roessli and O. Wermelinger (edd.), *Augustinus Afer. Saint Augustin: Africanité et Universalité* (Fribourg, 2003), 75–82, at 81–2.

²⁸ Stocks (n. 26 [2014]), 118.

Accusing a fellow countryman of behaving like the enemy is a rhetorical commonplace found elsewhere in the *Punica*, but this case is quite different, for instance, from that of Gestar calling Hanno an *Ausonius miles* (2.331).²⁹ What is questioned here is the identity of the Italian landscape itself, and especially that of a natural landmark which bears a fundamental symbolic and political significance. The extent of the identity crisis outlined here can be fully appreciated when viewed against the model provided by the *Iliad*. In his *machē parapotamios* Homer stresses the ethnicity of the Scamander precisely by underlining its affection for the Trojans and hence its role as their defender against the invader. Its reaction is triggered by the view of its fellow-citizens' corpses in its waters and, even more significantly, by Achilles denying its ability to protect them (21.128–38).³⁰ Significantly, this theme is further stressed at the resolution of the episode: once Hephaestus intervenes in Achilles' defence by setting the Scamander on fire, the river surrenders to the will of the Olympian gods by relinquishing its role as a defender of Troy (21.367–71). Silius' reworking of his model thus draws a sharp contrast between the two rivers, complicating the picture provided by the *Iliad*. Both the Trebia and Scipio defy the role they are expected to play. Instead of defending its motherland, the river revolts against its fellow countrymen; Scipio in turn behaves like an aggressor, threatening to devastate the landscape of Italy. The reversal of the Homeric picture thematizes the disruptive effect of Juno's wrath (and of her agent Hannibal) to the bonds of identity that hold the Italian peninsula together.

This thematic development, however, is not the result of the reworking of the epic tradition alone. Silius' shaping of the natural landscape thematizes issues that specifically pertain to the historiographical reflection on the Hannibalic War, and especially to Livy's Third Decade.³¹ In his narrative, Livy gives much prominence to Rome's relationship with her allies and, more specifically, to Hannibal's exploitation of the weaknesses inherent in Italian identity.³² On the one hand, Livy's account often represents the different peoples of the peninsula as unified by a common ethnic and cultural background. These shared roots are ideologically opposed to the otherness of Hannibal, the invader coming from the edge of the world.³³ An instructive instance is found in Varro's speech to the Capuans after Cannae. Demanding their support against Hannibal, the consul appeals to a shared Italian identity: the enemy they are facing is not an Etruscan or a Samnite—two actors in an enduring *local* struggle for hegemony—but the quintessential foreigner, leading an army of semi-humans (23.5.10–11). Livy's narrative, however, highlights how Hannibal's diplomatic manoeuvres threatened to undermine this alleged cultural unity. His arrival is represented as a shock affecting the Italian communities' fragile allegiance to Rome. This motif is also central to

²⁹ Seemingly based on Livy 23.12.7 *audiamus Romanum senatorem in Carthaginiensium curia* (Himilco speaking).

³⁰ Compare Hom. *Il.* 21.192–3, 238–9, 248–50, 308–10; cf. 14.433–6. On Scamander's bond with the Trojans, see C.J. Mackie, *Rivers of Fire. Mythic Themes in Homer's Iliad* (Washington, DC, 2008), 184; B. Holmes, 'Situating Scamander: "Natureculture" in the *Iliad*', *Ramus* 44 (2015), 29–51, at 42–3.

³¹ For a recent assessment of Silius' engagement with Livy, see G. Manuwald, 'Silius Italicus and the conventions of historical epic at Rome', in A. Augoustakis and M. Fucecchi (edd.), *Silius Italicus and the Tradition of the Roman Historical Epos* (Leiden and Boston, 2022), 19–36, at 30–1; see also, in the same volume, P. Esposito, 'Silius Italicus between epos and historiography', 37–52.

³² See especially D.S. Levene, *Livy on the Hannibalic War* (Oxford, 2010), 222–7; M. Mahé-Simon, 'L'Italie chez Tite-Live. L'ambiguïté d'un concept', *RPh* 77 (2003), 235–58.

³³ See further L. Beltramini, 'Una piaga venuta da genti lontane. Geografia e ideologia del conflitto nella terza decade liviana', *Lexis* 38 (2020), 461–90.

Silius' reading of the conflict, as his narrative questions the concept of *syngeneia* from the very beginning, especially in relation to the sack of Saguntum and to Capua's defection.³⁴

This Livian background helps a fuller appreciation of the ideological and political significance of the Trebia episode. In Livy, Rome's loss of authority is represented as the result of a domino effect caused by her defeat at Cannae (22.61.10–12). This depiction culminates in an image of contagion, employed in the description of civil strife at Croton (24.2.8): Livy (and his sources) regarded Hannibal's arrival as an infectious disease which spread all over Italy and suddenly changed the inclination of large portions of society. In the Trebia episode, Silius draws upon this imagery by referring to the river's *rabies*: 4.647–8 *quaenam ista repente | Sidonium, infelix, rabies te reddidit amnem?* Since the Late Republic, the term had become a keyword in the depiction of the Civil Wars,³⁵ and in this sense Silius employs it to describe the crisis that lies behind the river's attack on Scipio: this crisis is not merely a state of mental alteration but a loss of identity caused by Hannibal's invasion, which spreads like a contagious disease and ultimately leads to civil strife.³⁶ The political undertone of the term places the Trebia episode within a broader web of references to the Civil Wars that characterizes other key episodes of the poem, such as the sack of Saguntum, the defection of Syracuse and, of course, the pivotal battle of Cannae.³⁷ In this particular case, this thematization seems to derive from a reworking of minute details found in Livy's account, as is the case for the whole *machē parapotamios*, suggested by the historian's notice of the flooding of the Trebia on the day of the battle (21.54.9).³⁸ According to Livy, Scipio's decision to move the camp to the river was due to the rebellion of a group of Gallic auxiliaries that could have extended to all the local tribes, just like a contagious *rabies*: 21.48.3 *ratus contactosque eo scelere uelut iniecta rabie ad arma ituros*. As the first instance of a group of allies siding with the enemy, the episode foreshadows the domino-effect that Livy describes in the following years of war. Silius encapsulates this dynamic of rebellion and contagion in the landscape of Italy, by attributing the very *rabies* that in Livy threatens to undermine Rome's alliance with the Gauls to the Trebia, itself a Gallic river at the time of the Second Punic War: 4.644–5 *lacerum per Gallica riuus | dispergam rura*. Obviously, the unsettling implications of this betrayal are further emphasized by the fact that the river had become

³⁴ N.W. Bernstein, 'Family and state in the *Punica*', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 377–97, at 390–6.

³⁵ The use of *rabies* as a metaphor for civil wars is well attested in Late Republican and Augustan sources (Sall. *Or. Lep.* = *Hist.* 1.53.19 La Penna–Funari; Hor. *Carm.* 3.24.25–6), and especially in Lucan (e.g. 1.666–7; 7.557–9); see TLL 11.2.9.43–51; P. Jal, *La guerre civile à Rome: Étude littéraire et morale* (Paris, 1963), 421–5. Silius regularly employs the term in the sense of 'frenzy' (23 occurrences); this is the only instance where it is connected to the idea of betrayal.

³⁶ Cf. the similar remarks on the use of *discordia* referring to Varro (9.648) made by Dominik (n. 23), 281. On civil strife in the *Punica*, see R. Marks, 'Silius and Lucan', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 127–53.

³⁷ The topic has been explored in the chapters devoted to Silius in L. Donovan Ginsberg and D.A. Krasne (edd.), *After 69 CE: Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome* (Berlin and Boston, 2018): on Saguntum, see N.W. Bernstein, 'Inuitas maculant cognato sanguine dextras: Civil War themes in Silius's Saguntum episode', 179–97; on Cannae: M. Fucecchi, 'Flavian epic: Roman ways of metabolizing a cultural nightmare?', 25–49, at 30–4; on Syracuse: R. Marks, 'Sparsis Mauors agitatus in oris: Lucan and Civil War in *Punica* 14', 51–67; see also C. Stocks, 'Band of brothers: fraternal instability and civil strife in Silius Italicus' *Punica*', 253–70.

³⁸ See Nicol (n. 12), 31; Chaudhuri (n. 6), 207 n. 25; Haselmann (n. 1), 174–5.

an integral part of Italy by the Flavian Age.³⁹ This blurring of past and present—which features in Silius' depiction of other defecting Italian communities, especially Capua—invites the readers to question 'the myth of an ostensibly seamless Italian unity'⁴⁰ and appeals to their own political reality, still scarred by the Civil War of 69 C.E.⁴¹

The Trebia episode is especially interesting, as it marks the beginning of a thematic development that runs throughout the following books. As Hannibal's invasion progresses, the identity crisis embodied by the natural landscape becomes increasingly troublesome. Immediately after the battle, the hostility of the Italian landscape is further highlighted, as Silius describes Hannibal honouring the river's 'allied waves' and foreshadows the Roman defeat at Lake Trasimene (4.700–3).⁴² In the following narrative Juno further exploits the uncertain ethnicity of Italian river deities in Hannibal's favour. Her appearance in the disguise of Thrasymennus, the *numen* of the lake, conjures up the shocking image of the lake itself pointing the enemy to the place of his coming slaughter (4.737–8); in the opening of the following book, the lengthy *aition* concerning Thrasymennus stresses his foreign origin (5.7–23).⁴³ Hannibal's culminating victory at Cannae is determined by the betrayal of Anna Perenna, Dido's sister, who has been transformed into an Italian nymph, and whose ambiguous allegiance is thoroughly explored in another long digression (8.50–201).⁴⁴ Even more significantly, Silius depicts the beginning of the Roman recovery as the mending of this apparent erosion of identity. Juno's rousing of natural deities in the books leading up to Cannae is contrasted with—and reversed by—the intervention of *Oenotria Tellus*, who appears to Claudius Nero and guides him towards his victory at the Metaurus (15.522–59). *Tellus* re-establishes the dynamics of ethnic identification that Juno's wrath had disrupted: in her lament, Hannibal is represented as a foreigner who has violated her integrity and, as such, must be expelled before he can plant African seeds in her soil (15.527–41).⁴⁵ While it is true that this violation began with his crossing of the Alps, it is at the Trebia that Silius places the beginning of Juno's challenge to the Romans' identity, symbolized by a *discordia* that corrodes the very bond with their motherland. In this respect, the episode reveals the crucial function assigned to landscape in the construction of the *Punica*: by giving agency to nature, Silius crystallizes moral issues which are key for understanding the poem as a whole and resonated powerfully with the Flavian audience.

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³⁹ Cf. Chaudhuri (n. 6), 208. On Silius' treatment of 'not-yet-Roman spaces', see C.A. Schroer, 'Exul in orbe toto, or, how to map future power in Silius Italicus', in A. Augoustakis and M. Fucecchi (edd.), *Silius Italicus and the Tradition of the Roman Historical Epos* (Leiden and Boston, 2022), 210–31.

⁴⁰ See A. Augoustakis, 'Campanian politics and poetics in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, *ICS* 40 (2015), 155–69, at 156.

⁴¹ On Silius' allusions to the Civil War theme and the crisis of 69 C.E., see Fucecchi (n. 37), 27–8; Bernstein (n. 37), 196; Dominik (n. 23), 271.

⁴² Santini (n. 3), 91.

⁴³ See A. Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other. Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2010), 137.

⁴⁴ See Augoustakis (n. 43), 138, 141–3; R. Marks, 'Reconcilable differences. Anna Perenna and the battle of Cannae in the *Punica*', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2013), 287–301.

⁴⁵ See Santini (n. 3), 80; Augoustakis (n. 43), 144–6.