SILIUS ITALICUS ON THE FALL OF SAGUNTUM

DAVID VESSEY

IN THE second half of Book 2 of the *Punica*, Silius sets out his account of the fall of Saguntum.[1] By laying siege to the city Hannibal had directly challenged the might of Rome, revealing his scorn for treaties made in the past. The Saguntines, utterly loyal to the Romans, were accordingly the first victims of Punic perfidy. The capture of Saguntum inaugurated the greatest of all wars,[2] and its citizens, in their determined resistance to aggression and by their heroic end, figured forth an ideal of loyalty which Silius spared no pains to glorify. The struggle between the Saguntines and the Carthaginians is, on the moral level, a confrontation of *fides* and *perfidia* and, in cosmic terms, an emblem of the eternal battle between order and chaos, between spiritual law and anarchy.[3]

The importance of the siege is signalized by the fact that it is represented on the shield which the Spanish people gave to Hannibal earlier in Book 2: "eminet excelso consurgens colle Saguntos, / quam circa immensi populi condensaque cingunt / agmina certantum pulsantque trementibus hastis" (446–48). Saguntum towers above the besieging army; the vocabulary which Silius uses (*eminere*, *excelsus*, *consurgere*) is endowed with a moral as well as a descriptive force. In his first allusion to the city, Silius had used the same words (*excelso . . . colle*, 1. 275), but the repetition has added a new significance to them. On Hannibal's shield Saguntum becomes a symbol of sublime, tranquil virtue, standing above and apart from the turbulent mass of mankind, just as the Stoic sage, passionless and unchanging, is exalted above unredeemed humanity. The city is hemmed in (*circa . . . cingunt*) by violence and menace, but its spiritual grandeur is not affected. The depiction of the siege, therefore, reveals not only a historical fact, but its philosophical implications.

The gift of the shield brings Hannibal into direct relation with other epic heroes. First he is, like Turnus in the *Aeneid*,[4] a rebirth of Achilles, the archetypal enemy of Troy-Rome; he is also a Punic Aeneas, leading an invading force from North Africa to Italy in fulfillment of Dido's prophecy in *Aeneid* 4. 625 ff., but, because Punic, an *impius Aeneas*, foredoomed to defeat.[5] Unlike Achilles and Aeneas, Hannibal receives his shield from a human, not a divine, source ("clipeum . . . Oceani gentes ductori dona ferebant," 2. 395–96); his possession of an external symbol of heroic status has not received divine validation. Hannibal remains a man.

Hannibal himself appears on the great shield: "Hannibal, abrupto transgressus foedere ripas, / Poenorum populos Romana in bella vocabat" (451–52). Silius' words purposefully equate Hannibal with Julius Caesar, or, more precisely, with Lucan's Caesar. The phrase *abrupto foedere*

1. For a brief discussion of Silius' sources for his account, see J. Nicol, *The Historical and Geographical Sources Used by Silius Italicus* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 23–25.

2. Cf. Livy 21. 1. 1: "bellum maxime omnium memorabile quae unquam gesta sint," and Silius' assertion of the crucial importance of the war, in his proem (1. 3 ff.).

3. The significance of *fides* as a unifying concept in the *Punica* has been admirably treated by M. von Albrecht, *Silius Italicus: Freiheit und Gebundenheit römischer Epik* (Amsterdam, 1964), pp. 55 ff. He has rightly stressed the importance of the Saguntine episodes in Books 1 and 2 as establishing the ethical basis of the epic.

4. Cf. *Aen.* 6. 89: "alius Latio iam partus Achilles"; V. Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid* (trans. G. Seligson [Ann Arbor, 1962]), pp. 115, 127.

5. Cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–77.

echoes *Bellum civile* 1. 4 (*rupto foedere regni*); *transgressus ripas* recalls Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, which, no less than Hannibal's crossing of the Ebro, unleashed upon Rome the catastrophic horrors of war.[6] We are subtly reminded that the defeat of Carthage, though Rome's supreme triumph, was to pave the way for civil war and internal degeneration.[7] Line 452, with its juxtaposition of *Poenorum populos* and *Romana bella*, restates the historico-symbolic antithesis enunciated by Virgil at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (1. 13: *Karthago, Italiam contra*).[8] Hannibal summons the Carthaginians to a Roman war, the climax of an age-old rivalry; but it is to be a conflict between a mere human multitude (*populos*) and a greater destiny (*Romana bella*). The true character of the Carthaginian leader is further illustrated by Silius' lines at the end of the ecphrasis: "tali sublimis dono, nova tegmina latis / aptat concutiens humeris celsusque profatur: / heu quantum Ausonio sudabitis, arma, cruore; / quas, belli iudex, poenas mihi, Curia, pendes!" (453–56). The words aptly reveal Hannibal's inordinate lust for blood (cf., e.g., 1. 40, 59–60); the epithets *celsus* and *sublimis*, which could be indications of true nobility, are here suggestive only of pride and ambition. Hannibal's boast, though it is to be amply fulfilled in the campaign ahead (as predicted by Juno at 1. 42 ff.), is ultimately negated by his defeat. His ironic denomination of the senate as *iudex belli*, the "arbiter of war," is in the end proved appropriate. Hannibal is no more capable of obstructing Rome's rise to world hegemony than Achilles or Turnus before him. When Aeneas, at *Aeneid* 8. 729–31, took up his shield, he assumed a symbol of his descendants' immutable destiny, whereas Hannibal's shield anticipates only his personal and relatively short-lived success.[9] At this moment, Hannibal is presented in heroic guise, but his heroism is superficial, for he lacks those virtues which enabled the progeny of Aeneas to overcome Carthage. He is a hero defeated by Fate, by the fact of his Punic origin, and by his own innate depravity.[10]

Immediately after this passage, Silius depicts in grim terms the sufferings of the beleaguered Saguntines—sufferings which had established them in Roman literature as an *exemplum* of *fides* and *virtus*.[11] Animated in the past by the hope of a relieving force, they at last realize that now only destruction awaits them (459–61). They are tormented by hunger and thirst (461 ff.). The Romans have not responded to their desperate appeal for aid.[12]

Denied help on earth, the Saguntines are not forgotten in heaven. Hercules, the founder of their city, is filled with pity and dismay by their plight (475 ff.), and seeks to assist them. The connection between Saguntum and Hercules is a vital and determining factor in Silius' treatment of the siege. As elsewhere in Roman epic, Hercules is treated in the *Punica* as an

6. Cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55, on the parallel between Hannibal and Caesar; for Lucan's use of the same equation, cf. F. M. Ahl, "Hercules and Curio: Some Comments on *Phars.* IV. 581–824," *Latomus*, XXXI (1972), 997–1009 at 1007–8.

7. On this idea, cf. Sallust *Cat.* 10. 1 ff., with the remarks of D. C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 47–48.

8. Cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff.

9. Cf. B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1963), p. 342; Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

10. Cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 ff.; E. L. Bassett, "Hercules and the Hero of the *Punica*," in *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan* (ed. L. Wallach [Ithaca, N.Y., 1966]), pp. 258–73, at pp. 267–68. Silius' portrait of Hannibal was of course much affected by that of Livy, on which see esp. P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 103–105.

11. Cf. Luc. *BC* 3. 350 ff.; Petron. *Sat.* 140. 6; Juv. 15. 113–15; P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 107–108; Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59.

12. For details of the Saguntine embassy, see *Pun.* 1. 564–694.

ethical figure.[13] He represents triumphant *virtus*; he is the man who attained divinity through his labors on earth; he is the *cultor feri orbis*,[14] the *bonorum vindex*[15] who was, to the Stoics, an allegorical embodiment of their own highest aspirations.

In Book 1, Silius had recounted the myth of the city's foundation.[16] In it lies a prefiguration of the fate of Saguntum in Book 2. The name Saguntum, Silius asserts, was derived from a companion of Hercules called Zacynthus: "hic comes Alcidae remeabat in agmine Thebas / Geryone extincto caeloque ea facta ferebat" (1. 276–77). It was after his slaying of Geryon that Hercules visited Italy, there killing Cacus and establishing the Ara Maxima;[17] the hero's foundation of Saguntum was, therefore, an episode in his journey to Rome. Zacynthus, his *comes*, was bound to him by *fides*, just as Saguntum was to Rome. The description which Silius provides of the monstrous Geryon is significant: "tres animas namque id monstrum, tres corpore dextras / armarat ternaque caput cervice gerebat. / haud alium vidit tellus, cui ponere finem / non posset mors una viro, duraeque sorores / tertia bis rupto torquerent stamina filo" (278–82). Geryon with his three lives and triform body may be interpreted as a figure of Carthage, the city that waged war three times against Rome before its final destruction.[18] Zacynthus, however, despite his friendship with Hercules, was killed by a serpent: "hinc spolia ostentabat ovans captivaque victor / armenta ad fontes medio fervore vocabat, / cum tumidas fauces accensis sole venenis / calcatus rupit letali vulnere serpens / Inachiumque virum terris prostravit Hiberis" (283–87). The death of Zacynthus, caused by the treacherous serpent, prefigures the destruction of Saguntum by the perfidious Hannibal. Hercules did not save his companion, any more than the Romans protected their allies. Zacynthus, at the moment of his death, was displaying the Herculean *spolia*, foreshadowing the mistaken confidence which the Saguntines placed in their relations with Rome. In this myth, Hercules' defeat of Geryon is an anticipation of Rome's eventual triumph over Carthage, but the death of Zacynthus tragically glances forward to the doom of Saguntum. The Saguntines, as befits their origin, are inspired by truly Herculean—and, therefore, truly Roman—virtues, at a time when Rome, by abandoning the city to its fate, has temporarily rejected the sacred principle of *fides*.

From 2. 274 to 2. 631 the narrative is dominated by antithetical pairs of divine beings: Hercules and Fides, Juno and Tisiphone. If Hercules is, on one level, a symbol of Rome, then Juno fulfills her traditional role as the celestial counterpart of Carthage. While Hercules seeks aid in heaven for his protégés, Juno turns to the Underworld. Though cast in mythological terms and based on the traditional *deorum ministeria* of epic, the episode is an allegory: it is an objectification of a moral conflict of which the siege of Saguntum is but one instance. Like his contemporary Statius—though perhaps with less rigor—Silius tended to treat the gods as projections of abstract concepts rather than as truly supernatural beings.[19] The words of C. S. Lewis, in relation to the *Thebaid*, may also be applied to the *Punica*: "its gods are only abstractions and its abstrac-

13. For a thorough analysis, see Bassett's paper (n. 10); cf. also D. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 115.

14. Cf. Grattius *Cyneg.* 69–71.

15. Cf. Sen. *Ben.* 1. 13.

16. On the myth, see the remarks of Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

17. Prop. 4. 9; Virg. *Aen.* 8. 190 ff.; Livy 1. 7; Ov. *Fast.* 1. 545 ff.

18. Cf. *Pun.* 1. 8–11.

19. For Statius' attitude, cf. Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–76, 86–87.

tions, though confessedly belonging to the inner world, are almost gods."[20] This allegorizing approach was in accord with Stoic teaching, which had no real place in its cosmic scheme for independent deities. In short, Silius externalizes a human situation by presenting the inner or absolute meaning of the siege as a struggle between divine beings—that is, in terms which, since Homer, had been a conventional part of epic. Ranged on the side of the Saguntines stand Hercules, the personification of *virtus*, and Fides; supporting Hannibal we find Juno, the heavenly agent of Punic *impietas*, and Tisiphone, the instrument of madness and anarchic evil. The last days of Saguntum achieve a universal meaning; while the siege was a historical event, occurring at a defined moment of time, it is elaborated by Silius as a cameo or miniature of a far greater struggle which is not limited in time or space but coexistent with the universe.[21]

Rome had shamefully ignored the Saguntines' plea. By contrast, Hercules wishes to intervene on their behalf but is powerless to do so. It was axiomatic to Stoicism that no being, human or divine, could change or overturn the irresistible will of Fatum. The preordained chain of events could not be broken. Hercules, as he looks down on Saguntum, is well aware of this truth: "illacrimat fractae nequiquam casibus urbis: / namque metus magnique tenent praecepta parentis, / ne saevae tendat contra decreta novercae" (476–78). The tears of Hercules are shed in vain, for he cannot reverse the inevitable. The best that he can do is to appeal to the goddess Fides (479–80). He finds her in a distant quarter of heaven and addresses her, in the hope that she will grant some aid to the city that is suffering for her sake (481–92). At this point Silius designates Hercules as *Nemeae pacator* (483), identifying him as champion of peace and order.[22] His first words to Fides define her as a beneficent power: "ante Iovem generata, decus divumque hominumque, / qua sine non tellus pacem, non aequora norunt, / Iustitiae consors tacitumque in pectore numen . . ." (484–86).[23] Fides is older than Jupiter because she is a creative and sustaining principle in the cosmos. She reigns not only in inanimate nature (*tellus*, *aequora*), but also in the hearts of men.[24] She is, like her *consors* Iustitia, one of the moral forces on which the equilibrium (*sympatheia*) of the *mundus* depends. But her influence is consistently opposed and undermined by the lawless powers of evil. It is for this reason that, as she tells Hercules in her reply to his plea, she has been compelled to abandon the earth: [25] "sed me, pollutas properantem linquere terras, / sedibus his tectisque novis succedere adegit / fecundum in fraudes hominum genus . . ." (496–98). She catalogues the manifold crimes of men (498–503), concluding, "vis colitur, iurisque locum sibi vindicat ensis, / et probris cessit virtus, en aspice gentes—/ nemo insons; pacem servant commercia culpae" (504–506). Her words reflect and

20. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), p. 56.

21. It is not forgotten that Fides had a well-established cult at Rome, said to have been established by Numa (Livy 1. 21. 4): Otto, *s.v.* "Fides," *RE*, VI (1909), 2281–86. It is clear that Silius realizes her allegorical status in poetic terms and for structural purposes. To her meeting here with Hercules, we may compare, e.g., the confrontation between Tisiphone and Pietas in Stat. *Theb.* 11. 457–96 (on which cf. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54), where, similarly, a traditional mythological being and a Roman personification are juxtaposed within the framework of epic convention.

22. Cf. Sen. *Ben.* 1. 13, where Hercules is described as "malorum hostis, bonorum vindex, terrarum marisque pacator." See also Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–200, 313.

23. Silius' words are reminiscent of Lucr. 1. 1–5 on Venus: cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

24. Cf. Statius' words on Clementia, *Theb.* 12. 494: "mentes habitare et pectora gaudet."

25. Fides' remark echoes what Ovid says of Astraea at *Met.* 1. 150: for the Ovidian background, cf. R. T. Bruère, "*Color ovidianus* in Silius, *Punica* 1–7," in *Ovidiana* (ed. N. I. Herescu [Paris, 1958]), pp. 475–99, at pp. 478–79. For the same topos, see Statius' lines on Pietas, *Silv.* 3. 3. 4–5; *Theb.* 11. 457–58.

restate the Stoic view that the world is utterly corrupt, inhabited by an insane race.[26] Violence is worshiped; passion rules; *ius*, *virtus*, *pax* are trampled underfoot. At the present time, Hannibal epitomizes and embodies this depravity, but for him there is fixed a day of retribution (495). As for the Saguntines, all that Fides can do is to ensure that their end will be a noble one, worthy of their divine founder: "quod solum nunc fata sinunt seriesque futuri, / extendam leti decus atque in saecula mittam / ipsaque laudatas ad manes prosequar umbras" (510–12). Fides, in 510, summarizes the orthodox Stoic doctrine of Fate as an unbreakable chain of cause and effect.[27] She cannot save the Saguntines, whatever their merits; all she can do is to add some *decus* to their last hours, ensuring that their actions shall not be forgotten by posterity.[28] She descends to earth and, under her inspiration, the desperate citizens are filled with a new resolution and even greater endurance (513 ff.); no suffering, however grim, will compel them to betray *fides*: "insperatus adest vigor, interiusque recursat / dulcis honos divae et sacrum pro virgine letum. / it tacitus fessis per ovantia pectora sensus, / vel leto graviora pati . . ." (519–22). Although Silius has framed his account of this miraculous renewal of determination in mythological terms, it is clearly explicable on a purely psychological level. Fides may be seen as nothing other than a hypostatic figure of the internal motivation of the Saguntines, of their unalterable will to keep faith with Rome whatever the consequences.

Hercules and Fides, then, are personifications of ennobling moral qualities. Silius counterbalances them with the hostile deities Juno and Tisiphone. In general decor and detail, the poet, as always, drew heavily on his predecessors. The Silian Juno is, in essence, the Juno of the *Aeneid*, implacably hostile to the Roman cause.[29] Tisiphone is endowed with the full panoply of descriptive characteristics which we find attributed to the Furies in Virgil, Ovid, and Seneca.[30] The antithetic structure of the episode is carefully devised. If Hercules was touched by pity and love (475–76), Juno is stirred by hate and fury (526–30). Fides is an inhabitant of heaven, an embodiment of light, law, and peace; Tisiphone is a denizen of hell, a harbinger of darkness, disorder, and war.[31] There is an emblematic tension between good and evil, between heroism and madness, as events move on toward their dramatic climax.

Juno, the protectress and champion of Carthage, uses the aid of Tisiphone in her attempt to obliterate the effects of Fides' intervention. The Fury represents the depraved spirit of Carthage (consistently portrayed in the *Punica* as an earthly mirror of hell), which seeks to possess and to corrupt the allies of Rome. To achieve this purpose, Tisiphone assumes

26. Cf. Sen. *De ira* 3. 26. 4, *Ben.* 5. 17. 3; Vessey, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

27. For this doctrine in first-century epic, cf. H.-A. Schotes, *Stoische Physik, Psychologie und Theologie bei Lucan* (Habelts Dissertationsdrucke, Reihe klass. Phil. 5 [Bonn, 1969]), pp. 110–37; Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–91.

28. For a similar idea, cf. Diana's words to Apollo on the impending death of Parthenopaeus, Stat. *Theb.* 9. 663 ff., where, though accepting the decree of Fate, she promises to add some *decus* to his end.

29. Cf. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 167 ff.; J. Delz, "Die erste Junoszene in den Punica des Silius Italicus," *MH*, XXVI (1969), 88–100, at 88–89; A. J. Gossage, "Virgil and the Flavian Epic," in *Virgil* ("Studies in Latin Literature and its Influence," ed. D. R. Dudley [London, 1969]), pp. 67–93, at pp. 77–78.

30. Silius' most obvious debt in the whole incident is to *Aen.* 7. 323 ff. There are imitations too of Ov. *Met.* 4. 481 ff. (on which see Bruère, *op. cit.*, p. 479); cf. also the Fury in Sen. *Thyest.* 1 ff. Tisiphone also played a vital role in Statius' *Thebaid* (for a description of her, see esp. 1. 88 ff.): see Gossage, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82; Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–76, 161–64, 276–77.

31. Juno calls Tisiphone *Noctis alumna* (531), in contrast with Hercules' uplifting address to Fides (484–86).

the appearance of Tiburna, widow of Murrus (558–59).[32] She spreads a message of panic and despair, proclaiming the inevitability and imminence of defeat (560 ff.). She advocates mass suicide as the only way of escape from Carthaginian bondage, as the only possible course that *virtus* now offers to the Saguntines: "sed vos, o iuvenes, vetuit quos conscia virtus / posse capi, quis telum ingens contra aspera mors est, / vestris servitio manibus subducite matres. / ardua virtutem profert via. pergite primi / nec facilem populis nec notam invadere laudem" (575–79). Her rhetoric is speciously logical. It is true that there is no hope of salvation for Saguntum, and that Hannibal, when victorious, would wreak a terrible vengeance on the survivors. It is, however, the Fury's real intention to tarnish, not to enhance, the glory of the Saguntines. In this, as we shall see, she signally fails. She cannot erase the influence of Fides or cancel the promise that the citizens will be granted everlasting *decus*. The Stoic *sententia* used by Tisiphone in 578 is ultimately proved to be true—even though, in her mouth, it has no beneficent purpose but is intended to deceive. The Saguntines, like their founder Hercules, are to find immortality through death.[33] Even though they have to commit what would, in normal circumstances, be crimes, these too become aspects of their moral greatness. In the holocaust which follows Tisiphone's actions we are to see a final proof that there is nothing that the Saguntines are unwilling to offer for the sake of *fides* and *virtus*. Tisiphone's dishonest oratory, aimed at engendering evil, is in the end turned to the service of triumphant good.

After her speech, the Fury ascends to the *tumulus* which Hercules had erected in honor of Zacynthus (580 ff.). At that moment an omen of impending doom occurs: a snake emerges from the mound and makes its way through the city to the sea (584–91). Silius is imitating *Aeneid* 5. 84 ff., and the *anguis* is obviously to be regarded as the spirit of Zacynthus;[34] his abandonment of the *tumulus* reveals that the destruction of Saguntum is close at hand. Nor do we forget that it was a snake that had killed Zacynthus; the *anguis* also portends death for the Saguntine people.

Seeing this sign, the citizens are at once possessed by frenzy. They are now controlled by Tisiphone, the personification of *furor* and *impietas*, and, in their final desperation, they decide to destroy Saguntum and themselves rather than surrender to Hannibal: "sperare saluti / pertaesum, damnantque cibos, agit abdita Erinnys. / haud gravior duris divum inclementia rebus, / quam leti proferre moras; abrumpere vitam / ocius attoniti quaerunt lucemque gravantur" (594–98). They begin by burning their treasures, so that Hannibal shall find no plunder (599 ff.).[35] On the surface, it appears that Tisiphone's work has been successful. Madness has pervaded the city, and the determination implanted by Fides has evaporated. The Saguntines have undergone a further psychological change, and not an implausible one: they have passed from strength to *taedium vitae* and *amor mortis*.[36] The Fury casts a supernatural darkness over the scene, in which we may

32. Silius may here have been influenced by Valerius Flaccus' account of the Lemnian massacre, in which Venus disguises herself as Dryope to stir the women to frenzy and violence (*Argon.* 2. 174 ff.): cf. Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 172–73. Silius' description of the slaughter at Saguntum (592 ff.), though much is borrowed from *Aen.* 2, is similar in tone to Valerius' depiction of events at Lemnos (*Argon.* 2. 196 ff.).

33. Cf., e.g., [Sen.] *Herc. Oet.* 1940 ff., 1983 ff.

34. For snakes as spirits of the dead (an identification made by the Saguntines, 593–94), cf. R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 159, n. 2, 206–207.

35. Livy 21. 15. 1 says that Saguntum was captured *cum ingenti praeda*.

36. On these concepts, see esp. W. Rutz, "Amor mortis bei Lucan," *Hermes*, LXXXVIII (1960), 462–75; and n. 39 below.

see a symbol of the apparent victory of evil (609–11). The two lines that follow, however, show that the situation is in reality not one of unrelieved gloom: "inde opus aggressi, toto quod nobile mundo / aeternum invictis infelix gloria servat" (612–13). The vow of Fides is to be fulfilled. The mass suicide is a *nobile opus*, which will ensure that the glory of Saguntum—a glory that sprang from and overcame misfortune—shall live as long as the *mundus* itself. The use of the Herculean epithet *invictus* demonstrates that the Saguntines, in death as in life, are worthy of their protector Hercules the Unconquered.[37] When the Saguntines immolate themselves, erecting their own funeral pyre in the city, they are renewing and repeating Hercules' passion on Oeta, the prelude to his apotheosis.[38] Indeed, by freely accepting voluntary death, the Saguntines were, in Stoic eyes, adding the crown to a life of virtue.[39]

In recounting the final stages of the siege (614–80), Silius is nonetheless presented with a dilemma. On the one hand, he has to enhance and dignify this culminating moment, in which the Saguntines achieved the pinnacle of glory. On the other, he is faced with the fact that the act of communal destruction necessitated events which would normally be regarded as criminal and impious: the slaughter of relatives, the murder of wives by husbands, parents by children, brothers by brothers.[40] To circumvent this problem, Silius makes imaginative use of the mythological apparatus which he had introduced into the narrative. In his account, whereas the purpose and result of the self-imposed massacre are noble and uplifting, the concomitant violence is carried out under the guidance and encouragement of Tisiphone.[42] In one sense, therefore, Juno and Tisiphone unwittingly complete the work of Hercules and Fides. At 650 ff., the poet specifies the paradox involved: "quis diros urbis casus laudandaque monstra / et fidei poenas ac tristia fata piorum / imperet evolvens lacrimis?" (650–52). Crimes and horrors have become praiseworthy; *fides* has earned not reward but punishment; impious actions have become pious. In pursuit of a higher end, the customary code of morality has been suspended; the power of hell has been negated; even madness itself has been transmuted and purified. At this apocalyptic time, the Carthaginians, strangers to compassion, can scarcely refrain from weeping (652–53). Saguntum, like Troy in *Aeneid* 2, becomes a mass of flame, which is reflected on the sea: "resplendet imagine flammae / aequor, et in tremulo vibrant incendia ponto" (663–64). It is an impressive climax to the siege.

The final episode in the story concerns Tiburna, widow of Murrus. Earlier, as we have seen, Tisiphone had adopted the appearance of Tiburna to prosecute her nefarious designs. At 665 ff., the death of the real Tiburna is described.[42] By a neat antithesis, she is compared to the Fury Allecto, dispenser of punishments in the realm of Dis (671–74).[43] Tiburna piles her

37. On this epithet applied to Hercules, cf. K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), pp. 215, 217–20.

38. On another level, the burning of Saguntum is equivalent to the *ecpyrosis*, which will destroy the cosmos (with which, as we have seen, the *gloria* of the Saguntines is coexistent).

39. For the Stoic attitude to suicide, cf., e.g., J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 246 ff.; Schotes, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff.; Vessey, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–16. For another Silian suicide, see the incident of Solimus, 9. 168 ff.

40. The story of the twins Eurymedon and Lycormas (636 ff.), with its declamatory emphases, strikes a jarring note; it is a variant of an epic topos (see Vessey, *op. cit.*, p. 125). Silius has, however, kept the details of the massacre within decent limits.

41. Cf. 609–11, 614–16, 625–26.

42. The situation is misunderstood by Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 24, where he designates Tiburna as "the principal inspirer" of the carnage.

43. Equally effective in its context is the long simile at 683–91, in which the massacre is compared to the results of a hungry lion's attack on a sheepfold, with its evocation of brutality, bloodshed, and devastation.

dead husband's armor on a pyre, ignites it, and then stabs herself, falling into the flames (675–81). Just as the death of Murrus in Book 1 had served as a dramatic opening to the siege, so the suicide of his wife in Book 2 formally ends it.[44] The Carthaginians enter an empty Saguntum, while Tisiphone returns to the Underworld in triumph: "irrumpunt vacuam Poeni tot cladibus arcem; / tot demum ad manes, perfecto munere, Erinnys / Iunoni laudata redit magnamque superba / exsultat rapiens secum sub Tartara turbam" (692–95). The lines reveal the intimate symbolic connection between the Carthaginians and the hellish deities, between the African city and the place of eternal punishment.

Tisiphone's horrid joy is, however, shown to be ill founded by Silius' subsequent laudation of the Saguntine dead: "at vos, sidereae, quas nulla aequaverit aetas, / ite, decus terrarum, animae, venerabile vulgus, / Elysium et castas sedes decorate piorum" (696–98). By their devotion to *fides*, by their selfless acceptance of destiny, the Saguntines have earned immortality in this world and reward in the next. Despite the Fury's action, they remained *pii*, worthy of reverence and of taking their place with the sinless souls in Elysium.[45] By contrast, a day of vengeance awaits Hannibal. His perfidy will not go unpunished. The ghosts of the Saguntines will haunt him and, at the last, he will envy them their death (699–707).[46] It is on this prophetic note that the second book concludes. In it, good and evil, virtue and vice, reward and punishment are balanced and exhibited; in the divergent destinies of Hannibal and the Saguntines Silius typifies a moral truth which is transcendental and timeless.

The structure of the narrative is worthy of examination, for it is not lacking in subtlety: indeed, it reveals the *cura* which, as Pliny remarked, Silius devoted to his epic.[47] The scheme may be summarized as follows:

457–474 The sufferings of the Saguntines
- 475–512 Hercules and Fides: heaven
- 513–525 Fides' descent and its result: renewal
- 526–542 Juno and Tisiphone: hell
- 543–591 Tisiphone's intervention and its result: dissolution
  - *Tisiphone as Tiburna
- 592–664 *Furor* in Saguntum: destruction, massacre
- 665–680 The death of Tiburna
  - *Tiburna as Fury
- 681–695 The end of Saguntum; Tisiphone departs

696–698 *Laudatio* of the Saguntines: heaven
699–707 Prophecy of Hannibal's death: hell

The careful symmetry is immediately apparent. 457–74 and 681–95 are the frame in which the last stages of the siege, human and divine, are enclosed. The movement is progressive and cohesive. The doom of Saguntum is never in doubt:

44. For Murrus, see 1. 376 ff.

45. On this, see further the remarks of Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59; for the parallel between Saguntum and Troy, pp. 181–83.

46. It is notable that in 706 Silius describes Hannibal as "invictus quondam . . . bellator," indicating that he is a failed Hercules, a potential hero corrupted by evil (cf. Vessey, *op. cit.*, p. 115, n. 2). The inevitable punishment of Hannibal's *perfidia* and *impietas* is defeat, exile, and an inglorious death. The last words of the book ("Stygias . . . ad undas / deformata feret liventi membra veneno") glance back, perhaps, to the serpent that killed Zacynthus (1. 285–86); the "serpent" dies at last through his own poison.

47. Plin. *Ep.* 3. 7. 5.

but Silius has based the development of his narrative on antitheses which provide it with a symbolic form. The dramatic tempo increases as the denouement is reached. The central motif, the "ethische Grundtendenz des Werkes," as Von Albrecht terms it,[48] is made explicit and permanent in the final section (696–707). Whereas the Saguntines have attained a universal status through their heroism, Hannibal is only a temporary and passing factor in history. This interpretation of events transcends the specific to become a cosmic truth. Silius, whatever his failings as a poet, had, like Lucan, seen that the historical epic was in no way inferior to the mythological as an instrument of philosophical and moral revelation.

QUEEN MARY COLLEGE,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

48. Von Albrecht, *op. cit.*, p. 197.