


BRILL

---

Review
Reviewed Work(s): Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus by F. Spaltenstein
Review by: V. J. Chr. Hunink
Source: *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 46, Fasc. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 286-287
Published by: Brill

---

F. SPALTENSTEIN, *Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus* (livres 1 à 8); (livres 9 à 17) (Univ. de Lausanne, Publication de la Fac. des Lettres, XXVIII). Genève, Librairie Droz, 1986-90. XX, 563; 527 pp. Pr. Sfr. 55,—; 55,—.

Silius' long epic poem on the Second Punic war does not attract many readers, not even among Latinists. For a long time this may have been partly due to the lack of good editions and research tools. However, in the last few years much has happened in this field. New editions have been published in the Budé series and the Teubner series and a concordance by Mr. Wacht was published in 1989. Mr. Spaltenstein's now completed commentary, based on Delz' Teubner text of 1987, fills another gap. Writing a commentary on the 17 books of the *Punica* in 1100 pages is no small enterprise and we may congratulate Mr. Spaltenstein on his achievement. But regrettably, his commentary is not likely to win many new readers for Silius.

Already in the first pages of his work, Spaltenstein clearly defines the nature of his commentary: he has chosen a strictly philological approach, "parce que je répugne aux interprétations qui trop souvent substituent une construction arbitraire à l'étude même des textes" p. vi). Spaltenstein claims to have developed a practical tool giving information immediately relevant to the text. Difficult words and phrases are explained and many parallels within the *Punica* itself and other epic poems are given. The historical material which forms the background of Silius' poem is only discussed where this is necessary for a proper understanding of the text. Spaltenstein

focuses upon motifs originating in the epic tradition, on which he provides many clear and concise notes. Scholarly literature on Silius and Roman epic has been almost completely left out of account (even a bibliography is absent) and the reader is referred to general reference works such as *RE*, Roscher and the standard lexica.

The commentary does certainly live up to its own standards, but it is these standards which may be questioned. Commentaries on classical authors may be required to reflect changes in literary theory, at least to some extent. In the context of modern study of literature an aversion to interpretation as expressed by Spaltenstein seems a strange anachronism. Even classical scholars are increasingly growing aware that subjective elements cannot be avoided in their work, and should be defined and made explicit rather than be denied and ignored. Any interpretation of the *Punica*, whether historical or literary, would have enabled readers to take a fresh look at Silius, and would have helped them to form their own opinions on the problems involved in his poem. Now, Spaltenstein's commentary merely provides a mass of material, but leaves the readers without guidance on all issues which go beyond the boundaries of strict philology.

As things are, Silius is likely to remain a dull and despised poet for specialized scholars for some time to come. Future commentaries on parts of the *Punica* will doubtlessly benefit from Spaltenstein's impressive work. But it may be hoped that they will continue where he has left off.

6522 GB NIJMEGEN, Museum Kamstraat 29 V.J.CHR. HUNINK