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STATIUS
THEBAID
BOOKS 1–7



Edited and Translated by
D. R. SHACKLETON BAILEY

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藏书章



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THEBAID
ACHILLEID

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INTRODUCTION

Apart from a marginal mention by his younger contemporary Juvenal, what is known of the poet's life and personality comes from his *Silvae*. His name, Publius Papinius Statius, is given in his manuscripts. The surname (*cognomen*) Statius was by origin an Italian personal name, and so like other such borne by slaves, who after getting their freedom would take it as a surname and pass it on to their descendants. The poet of course was no slave, neither was his father, whose name is nowhere actually attested. Statius' father was a native of Velia on the southwest coast of Italy, but moved to Neapolis (Naples), a Greek colony, which remained a centre of Hellenic culture after acquiring Roman citizenship. Here his son was born, probably about 50 AD. Papinius senior was a savant and a poet, winning prizes for his compositions at the regularly recurring festivals both in Naples (the Augustalia) and in Greece (Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games). He was probably a Knight, but may have lost his qualification because of a financial reverse, after which he made a career as a teacher of literature, especially Greek, and Roman antiquities. According to his son, pupils flocked in from far and wide, and Romans of high rank were schooled to fit them for their futures, particularly as members of the great priestly colleges. While planning a poem on the eruption

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of Vesuvius in 79 he died¹ and was buried on a small property he (or his son) owned near Alba Longa, a few miles from the capital.

Following in his father's footsteps the young Statius won prizes at the Augustalia and later at the Alban festival instituted by the Emperor Domitian (ruled 81–96), where he produced a poem on the founder's German and Dacian campaigns. Probably after his father's death he moved to Rome and competed unsuccessfully at the great Capitoline festival, possibly in 90—the disappointment of his life. That may have had something to do with his subsequent decision to return to Naples, where he will have died in about 96. He married Claudia, widow of a well-known singer and mother of a musically gifted daughter. He himself was childless, but in his closing years he made up for it with a favourite slave boy whom he freed and whose early death he laments in his last extant poem (*Silvae* 5.5). But contrary to what has sometimes been assumed from v. 73 of the same, there was no adoption (vv. 10–11).

Thebaid

Statius' *magnum opus*, an epic in twelve Books on the mythological theme of the Seven against Thebes, in which he had been preceded by the fifth–fourth century Antimachus of Colophon, was published after twelve years of work (*Thebaid* 12.811) and torturous revision (*Silvae* 4.7.26), probably in 92. Meanwhile the *Silvae* with prob-

¹ Not, however, necessarily soon after it but at any rate before March 90; see the discussion in Coleman's edition of *Silvae* Book IV, pp. xviii–iv.

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able composition dates 89–96 appeared in three instalments; see Introduction to the same in volume I of this edition of Statius. In 95 he began a new epic, ambitiously planned to cover the life and death of Achilles, but broke it off in its second Book, leaving the hero on his way to Troy.

Virgil was Statius' unapproachable idol: 'Rival not divine Aeneis, but follow from afar and ever venerate her footsteps,' so he takes leave of his *Thebaid* (12.310–19). At the same time he had high hopes for the latter's immortality, claiming that the Emperor already deigns to notice it and that the youth of Italy is learning it by heart—presumably at school. Extracts, therefore, had already become available, taken down perhaps in shorthand or handed out at periodic recitations before audiences that included senators (*Silvae* 5.2.161). Writing about a quarter of a century later, Juvenal tells us that these exhibitions were eagerly looked forward to and enthusiastically received, but financially unrewarding—the poet went hungry. However, with a property at Alba and the support of the Emperor and wealthy patrons, Statius was assuredly no pauper.

The *Thebaid* is set firmly in epic tradition, complete with sky-dwellers and infernals, heroes and elders, tyrants and prophets, Games and catalogues, and a generous supply of lions to populate relentless similes. The war at Thebes occupies the latter half; it is held in frame by the successive dooms of the champions. Their diversity mitigates the monotony of slaughter, along with forceful or pathetic figures and narratives. In the earlier Books the poet has a freer range, creating loosely connected tableaux, episodes within episodes: Coroebus and the monster, Hypsipyle's story. Imagination is not lacking: Polynices' journey and arrival at Argos, Tydeus' embassy and ambush

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once read are not forgotten. Lacking is the dynamic, psyche fused with theme, that gave wings to Dido's death and, yes, to Pompey's funeral. *Si vis me flere, dolendum est*. Statius sees his pageant from outside.

There is style: 'dense and elaborate' (Coleman), replete with conceit and hyperbole, stretching language to the point of obscurity, favouring spacious periods intricately articulated; a feast for amateurs of the ornate, but for some a challenge readily declined. It is constant throughout in *Silvae* and *Thebaid*; as to the *Achilleid*, an implicit palinode, more later.

There is metrical technique. No question about Statius' mastery there, second only to if not rivalling Virgil's, earning an incidental accolade from Housman ('this superb versifier'), who 'read the *Thebaid* not more than three times, nor ever with intent care and interest' (*Cl. Papers* 1197).

In the Middle Ages the author of the *Thebaid* was a prime favourite, Dante's sweet poet, highlighted by the encounter in *Purgatorio*. For Julius Caesar Scaliger in the cinquecento, as D. W. T. Vessey has reminded us, Statius was, aside from Virgil ('we should add Homer,' and I for one should add Lucan), 'both of Latin and Greek Epic writers easily the chief'—not after all so lavish a tribute as it sounds. In the shadow of nineteenth-century Romanticism and its aftermath Statius' reputation went into a long eclipse, but the last three decades of the twentieth saw a marked revival of interest and appreciation, however parochial, for both parts of his oeuvre.

Well over a hundred extant manuscripts of the *Thebaid* testify to its vogue in medieval and renaissance culture.

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One of them, Parisinus 8031 (P), called Puteanus after a sixteenth-century owner, is of the ninth or tenth century, probably a product of Corbie Abbey. Like Juvenal's Montepessulanus, it has no peer. The rest, leaving aside those later than the twelfth century as negligible, are collectively known as ω . Hill's edition, for example, uses seventeen, plus two fragmenta, and lists another three, plus five fragmenta, as 'rarius citata.' P and ω derive from a common archetype of uncertain date and provenance. But it is no longer permissible to say, with J. H. Mozley, that the latter hang very much together; closer research has blurred the edges, as with Martial's three families. P readings abound throughout in individual members or minority combinations of members, and certain of them can be classed as intermediate.² But this being a matter of virtually no practical importance, my critical notes, necessarily skeletal, do not cite ω manuscripts individually but use ψ to indicate minority readings within the group (whether shared with P or not) when these seem worth notice. Add that ς has its usual function as denoting early readings of conjectural status, whether or not they happen to occur in a late manuscript. Where my text prints a correction, my notes regularly give the manuscript reading followed by the name of the corrector in parenthesis, except that many early ones are passed over as obvious and generally accepted.

Of interest is the occurrence of variants (e.g. 1.32 *perio* P: *laurigero* ω ; 3.527 *celi* P: *nili* ω) which cannot be due to graphical error. Whatever their origin, the theory of a second edition made by the poet himself can be ruled out sim-

² See R. Lesueur's Budé edition, I, lxiii.

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ply because he cannot be thought responsible for some of them.³

By common consent the general superiority of P entitles it to preference over ω except where ω prevails by merit; a principle that every editor must apply as his judgment, or want of it, dictates.

Scholia (Σ) attributed to one Lactantius Placidus, thought to have lived between the fourth and sixth century, were edited by R. Jahnke in 1898. As commentary they are of little help, but their readings have evidential value.

Statius' works were first edited in Rome in 1419. D. E. Hill's list of the *Thebaid's* nine most illustrious editors ('clarissimi cuiusque editoris'), with brief descriptive comments,⁴ begins with J. F. Gronovius (1653). The lists of critical articles and monographs include other great names: Bentley, N. Heinsius, Markland, Madvig, Housman. More recently L. Håkanson's *Thebaid* (1973), following his *Silvae*, stands out.

Lately, however, Statian scholarship has taken a different road, and again I am deeply indebted to Kathleen Coleman for her expert survey of this activity, relating to the epics, in this volume.

There is no modern commentary on the *Thebaid*, though a number of Books have been edited separately (see Coleman's survey).

Translations, verse and prose, exist in several lan-

³ On the similar situation in Martial see p. vii of my Teubner edition: 'trium recensionum lectiones varias ad poetam non redire ex ipsarum natura certo certius est.'

⁴ See also Lesueur, I, lxxiv–lxxvi.

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guages. Mine is mostly independent of these, though I have kept an eye on Mozley's Loeb translation (1928) and occasionally consulted Lesueur's and a verse rendering by A. D. Melville (Oxford 1992). Statius' style makes the proper balance between fidelity and readability particularly hard for his interpreters to capture, provoking diversities of understanding and nuance to be distinguished from mere blunders. As in the *Silvae*, my notes, supplemented by the index of names, provide a minimum of requisite information plus revelatory or argumentative matter as occasion arises.

Achilleid

The *Thebaid* disposed of, Statius launched a second epic on the life and death of Achilles. According to its opening it was to contain the hero's career from his youthful adventure in Scyros on. One Book and part of a second survives, leaving him *en route* for the Trojan War.

The obvious assumption is that death or ill-health leading to death made him abandon the project. After the publication of *Silvae* Book IV in 95⁵ nothing is heard of him, apart from the posthumous publication of Book V. As for the *Achilleid*, *Silvae* 4.7.21–24 mentions a stoppage, flatteringly ascribed to the absence of the friend to whom the piece is addressed (probably written in 94 between spring and early autumn); yet in 5.2.161–64, probably written in the summer of 95, he is looking forward to public recitations of his ongoing composition.

But suppose he had been able to stay at work long

⁵ On this date see Coleman's edition, p. xii.

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enough to complete the project. The Scyros episode is a light-hearted story with details supplied, as far as we know, by the poet's own imagination.⁶ It makes pleasant reading and the tone is a world apart from the sombre and sanguinary tale of the Seven. But after Achilles' arrival at the war—what? A rehash of the *Iliad*? An unpromising prospect surely. Did Statius find himself in a cul-de-sac?

Furthermore: if the style of the surviving *Achilleid* is the man, here is a new Statius. All that is meant by 'mannerism' has almost disappeared. The new look is Ovidian, short of Ovid's levity. The revolution⁷ must have been deliberate, not imposed by the theme. Mannerism, pervasive in the *Silvae* as in the *Thebaid*, need not change with genre. We may suppose that after his disappointment at the Capitoline festival, which evidently rankled (*Silvae* 3.5.28–33; 5.3.231–33), he simply decided that it was time for a change. But I have failed to think of a good literary parallel.

Not all manuscripts of the *Thebaid* contain the *Achilleid*, but a good many (including P) do, so that the textual situation is essentially the same. The workmanlike edition with commentary by O. A. W. Dilke (Cambridge, 1954) remains unique.

⁶ The trumpet blast which brought Achilles out of disguise (1.874ff.) diverges from the usual account; see J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus* (Loeb edition), II, 74, n.1. *Apollodorus* and *Hyginus* have it from a common source if not from Statius himself.

⁷ Mostly unremarked in secondary literature. Mozley is an honourable exception: 'the poet's style is simpler and less artificial than in the *Thebaid*.'

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON THE *THEBAID* AND *ACHILLEID*: AN OVERVIEW*

KATHLEEN M. COLEMAN

Given the renaissance of interest in post-Virgilian epic in the latter decades of the twentieth century, this essay is perforce drastically selective. It does not include items on Statius' background and formation, since these topics are covered in the essay on the *Silvae* that is the companion to this one (Coleman 2003). Nor does it venture to assess scholarship on the vast influence of the *Thebaid* in the Middle Ages, powerfully epitomized for readers of Dante by his meeting with Statius and Virgil in Purgatory. The enormous range of modern studies on the *Thebaid* has been summarized as far as the middle of the nineteen-nineties (Dominik 1996a); the focus in what follows is on English-language scholarship, although it would be unfair to omit reference to a pioneering work of the "Statius renaissance" in German (Schetter 1960). For the *Achilleid*, however, adequate coverage demands that scholarship in other languages be given prominence. Although treated

* In preparing this survey I have sought advice from Bruce Gibson, Peter Heslin, and Charles McNelis, to all of whom I am properly grateful.

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selectively here, a multilingual volume of essays celebrating Statius' nineteen-hundredth anniversary provides a representative cross-section of trends in contemporary criticism on his entire *oeuvre* (Delarue *et al.* 1996).

Thebaid

The first half of the twentieth century failed to find much to appreciate in the *Thebaid*. Because Statius explicitly envisages his epic following in the footsteps of the *Aeneid*, his self-acknowledged debt to Virgil at times earned him labels along the lines of "derivative," "slavish imitator," and "lacking in originality."¹ These views have been variously and resoundingly refuted in the late twentieth-century rehabilitation of Statius' reputation as a consummate epic artist, although the concept of "defensive imitation" still betrays the tenacity of the old view (Williams 1986). But the problem is not only aesthetic; it is also ideological. Even while earning admiration for his literary qualities, Statius has been tarred with the brush of Domitianic despotism, a repressive regime that the *Thebaid* has been assumed to vindicate (Vessey 1973). Towards the end of the century, however, a revisionist interpretation promoted the poem as a commentary upon the evils of civil war, and hence an explicit challenge to the legitimacy of the Flavian

¹ A random example expresses the insult with Gallic elegance: "Les épopées de Stace sont des oeuvres artificielles, sans originalité dans l'invention et surtout sans sincérité," J. Humbert, *Histoire illustrée de la Littérature Latine. Précis méthodique* (Paris and Toulouse, 1932), 298.

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regime (Ahl 1986) and to the brutal means that Vespasian employed to restore order after the "year of the four emperors" in AD 69 (Dominik 1989). Indeed, the latter view has been developed into a somewhat inflexible thesis equating power in the *Thebaid* with relentless cruelty, and concluding that Statius' audience (like the inhabitants of the free world in the twentieth century) would necessarily recoil from the horror of this picture (Dominik 1994b).

The view that sees Statius as a heroic voice for the opposition has been adduced to explain certain characteristics of the narrative. The contemporary political and intellectual climate has been held to account for such features as the prominence of suicide in both Statius' *Thebaid* and Silius' *Punica*, suicide and assassination being held to be the only options for escaping from a tyranny (McGuire 1989). Despite the risks of anachronism, a more extensive study by the same author interprets all three instances of Flavian epic (*Punica*, *Thebaid*, and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*) as protest literature (McGuire 1997). An influential general study of the post-Virgilian epic tradition, however, shows that epic is a genre that shares one of the primary concerns of any imperial system, namely a preoccupation with finding a balance amid "the instabilities of power" (Hardie 1993). All the successors to Virgil, Hardie argues, confront this problem in some way, as they also confront the struggle between good and evil, and the issue of succession, both political and literary. Not that Statius necessarily finds an equilibrium: on the contrary, the *Thebaid* can be said to display a marked imbalance, war and violence far outweighing forgiveness and peace. It has recently been suggested that this imbalance need not,

however, be read as a critique of the Domitianic regime, but rather as a reflection of Statius' view of mankind as a whole (Franchet d'Espèrey 1999).

In the *Thebaid* Greek myth can be seen as a vehicle for a particularly Roman preoccupation with the relationship between politics and the family (Hardie 1993). On this analysis, the relationship that is at the heart of the Roman power structure lies at the heart of the *Thebaid* also; in this respect Statius demonstrates a self-conscious debt to his predecessors, especially Lucan. Succession is thwarted as one hero after another is snatched away by death. Still, Hardie's study concedes that a model for smooth succession seems to be offered in the choice of Theodamas to take over the role of seer from Amphiaraus after his tragic and premature death; the smooth transfer of office is posited as a model for cooperation and for continuity of authority. If, however, Flavian epic seems to reflect the male-dominated structure of contemporary Roman society, a recent feminist study of the role of women in the entire genre of Roman epic has highlighted a contrasting dimension (Keith 2000). Keith argues that Statius and his contemporaries employ the theme of civil war to reflect conflict between the sexes, and to explore the function of female impulses (personified, most obviously, in the Furies) in precipitating conflict.

Contemporary relevance, however, is not restricted to the sphere of politics and moral codes. The funeral games for Archemorus (previously called Opheltes) in *Thebaid* 6 have long been recognized as heir to the games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23 and to their Roman counterpart, the games in honor of Anchises in *Aeneid* 5. But a recent study points to unique aspects of Statius' treatment of this mo-