

**THE SILVAE
OF STATIUS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649136520

The Silvae of Statius by D. A. Slater

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D. A. SLATER

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OF STATIUS**

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THE SILVAE OF STATIUS

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES

BY

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OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1908

PREFACE

THERE appear to be two reasons why the *Silvae* of Statius have never before been translated into English. In the first place, the text has until recent years been perpetually changing. Even now it can hardly be regarded as settled. But the hope of obtaining further MS. evidence is slight, and the appearance of Vollmer's commentary and of fresh recensions in three series—the Teubner, the new Corpus, and the Bibliotheca Oxoniensis—marks a distinct epoch in the literary history of the volume. There is, in fact, no longer quite the same difficulty of interpretation that Politian felt when he declared that 'si quis Papinium pergat excutere, nullum fore inquirendi finem; vixque absoluto superiore statim scrupum alium occurrere'¹. The general student is not now, as of old, confronted at every step with unsolved problems in textual criticism. The second reason is this. The style of Statius is so extremely artificial, and his meaning at times so hard to grasp, that it is usually difficult, and often impossible, to produce a rendering that shall be at once idiomatic and faithful to the original. 'Quel français pourrait rendre, quelle logique pourrait expliquer et *hoc* et *illud*?' says M. Nisard in referring to two expressions of the poet: and if so brilliant a writer as M. Nisard has to own himself at fault, it may reasonably be inferred that the task is not easy. Nevertheless the poems have been translated into French, German, and Italian, and it

¹ See Markland's note on J. iii. 53.

is time that in English also a version should be attempted, if they are to be made accessible to the average scholar, and read as widely as they deserve.

The ideal translation would necessarily be in verse. It is a pity that Pope confined himself to rendering a single book of the *Thebaid*; for Pope had much in common with Statius, and a translation by him might have come as near as a translation ever can come to conveying in English the effect of the Latin. He would have reproduced something of the brilliancy and finish of the original: and his verse, through the mirror of a perfect form, would have reflected the splendour of the Statian Hexameter, which at its best is unsurpassed except in Virgil. All this is beyond the reach of humble prose; but until a poet takes the matter in hand, even a prose rendering is probably better than none. The belief that this is so has led me to complete, after a long interval, a version which was begun six years ago for the purposes of a course of lectures on the poems to the students in the Humanity classes at Glasgow. The work, which was originally designed to form the first volume of a complete edition of the *Silvae*, would hardly have been finished (in the very scanty leisure at my disposal) even now, but for the generous assistance of Professor Phillimore, who, with characteristic kindness, went through the whole in manuscript at a time when he was fresh from his recension of the text, and not only solved several of the more inscrutable difficulties, but also suggested again and again some felicitous turn or concise rendering, where the temptation to be content with a feeble con-

strue or a vague paraphrase was almost irresistible. Nor do my obligations end here. Professor Hardie of Edinburgh has read through the whole, and Mr. Garrod of Merton a large part, of the translation as it passed through the press, and to both of them I am indebted for valuable suggestions and corrections; while I have also to thank my colleague, Mr. Franck Arnold of Cardiff, for many shrewd criticisms and much ungrudging assistance. For all the shortcomings in what has proved to be a difficult undertaking the responsibility rests with me alone.

The text followed in the translation is that of the *Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, except where a footnote indicates a divergence. It seemed convenient to accept that text as a general rule, even in places where other readings presented greater attractions. But it will probably be admitted that more latitude is permissible in Statius than in other authors, and I have therefore occasionally allowed myself to adopt—usually in passages of more than ordinary difficulty—either a rival emendation, or a stop-gap conjecture of my own. The author of each such reading is named in the note. The variants for which I am myself responsible are indicated by an asterisk; some of these last were published in the *Journal of Philology* (vol. xxx, pp. 133-60), others are new.¹

Notes have been very sparingly added. The commentaries of Stephens (Cambridge, 1651) and Vollmer

¹ In a few places the translation goes back from conjectures to the readings of the MSS. In such cases the letter M indicates the Madrid MS., and the symbol S inferior MSS. or anonymous corrections that date from the Renaissance.

(Leipzig, 1898) are pretty generally accessible, and the reader cannot afford to dispense with one or other of these guides, if he wishes to acquire something more than a mere nodding acquaintance with the poet.

My obligations to magazine articles and miscellaneous criticisms are too numerous to identify and acknowledge in detail here, but an effort has been made to refer to its author any important debt of which I am conscious. Special mention should, however, be made of papers in the *Journal of Philology* by Professor Robinson Ellis and Mr. Hugh Macnaghten; by Professor Housman and Professor Postgate in the *Classical Review*, and by Professor Postgate in *Philologus*. There is also one critique, which in spite of considerable bias and some inaccuracy is so lively and stimulating that I have allowed myself to refer to it—and even to quote it—with what may be thought undue frequency. M. Nisard, in the first volume of his *Études de mœurs et de critique sur les Poètes Latins de la Décadence*, devotes some seventy-five pages to Statius. In the preface to his second edition (1849) he speaks of these studies as a young man's work, and is inclined to regard the judgements as severe. His readers will probably endorse this opinion: but the chapters on Statius are too piquant to be left unread, and it would be difficult to find a more animated and at the same time more faithful account of the conditions under which the poetry of the silver period was for the most part produced.

LLANISHEN, GLAM.

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INTRODUCTION

I

PUBLIUS PAPINIUS STATIUS, 'il dolce poeta,' the man who used almost by common consent to be regarded as the most eminent poet of the silver age, and whom Pope considered second only to Virgii among Latin writers, the pagan through whose verse shines at times so touching a piety and so religious a devotion, that down to Dante's day, if not later, he was thought to have been in secret and at heart a Christian,¹ was born at Naples in about the year 45 A.D. So slight is the record of him which has come down to us in contemporary literature, that until the rediscovery of the *Silvae* in the year 1417-18 by Poggio Bracciolini, on the occasion of his attendance in the Papal retinue at the Council of Constance,² the authorship of the *Thebaid* was ascribed to Statius the rhetorician of Toulouse. It was under this style that he was known and loved by Dante and Boccaccio. And it is as

The Tholosan that hightè Stace

that he finds a niche in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.³

¹ See Dr. Verrall's article in the *Independent Review*, vol. i (1903), pp. 246 sqq.

² The point was first established by Mr. A. C. Clark, *C. R.* vol. xiii (1899), pp. 124 sqq.

³ iii. 370.