

BOOK REVIEW

Statius, Thebaid 8. Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary. By ANTONY AUGOUSTAKIS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. lxxv + 449. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-199-65533-5.

Flavian epic deserves to be read with the same care as Augustan poetry, and scholars are finally beginning to produce the modern, full-scale commentaries that facilitate such reading. Augoustakis' Oxford commentary on *Thebaid 8* appears as part of a recent resurgence of dedicated philological attention to Statius' works. This decade offered Parkes' commentary on *Thebaid 4* (Oxford 2012) and Newlands on *Silvae 2* (Cambridge, 2011). We may look forward soon to Gervais on *Thebaid 2* (Oxford 2017), Berlincourt on *Thebaid 3*, and McNelis on the *Achilleid*. Augoustakis' work also draws on the recent series of edited volumes on Flavian epic, several overseen by Augoustakis himself. There is considerable dialogue in this commentary with Gervais on *Thebaid 2*, in no small part because, as Augoustakis observes on 8.663–664, "Tydeus' *aristeia* is a continuation of the ambush in book 2." Augoustakis also draws on Bennardo's 2010 dissertation, an Italian commentary on Book 8's first 270 lines.

The Introduction focuses on the four major episodes of Book 8: Amphiaraus' descent to the Underworld; Thiodamas' *placatio Telluris*; Ismene's reaction to the killing of her fiancé Atys; and Tydeus' cannibalism. Both the introduction and commentary offer full discussion of the reception of a poet beloved in all subsequent ages of Latin literature, from the Christian poems of late antiquity through the Latin and vernacular works of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Tydeus' cannibalism is one of the touchstones of the *Thebaid* for later ages, but later Latin poets also adapted characteristic Statian phrases in a wide variety of literary contexts.

Augoustakis' text is much more Hall's (5 differences) than Hill's (26 differences). He generously discusses the arguments for rejected readings, in welcome contrast to commentators who present more summary judgments. The lengthy lists of scholars' names might have been curtailed, however; textual judgments are not made by majority vote. Augoustakis' lucid discussion of the difficult 8.147–148 is an exemplary model of judgment and exposition. The translation

preserves some of Statius' unfamiliarity, such as leaving the name *Eumenis* untranslated (8.10), but includes explanatory glosses where essential, such as 8.365 *subitum* "suddenly elected". There are none of Shackleton Bailey's Victorianisms or ellipses, and Augoustakis only once resorts to scare quotes in order to explicate a Statian metaphor: at 8.125, *arma* are a lion's "weapons".

The commentary reveals deep learning from the first line's discussion of Statius' use of archaic idiom and the thematic significance of the placement of the line's final word, *umbris*. Augoustakis is sensitive throughout to Statius' visual rhetoric and synaesthetic effects; the discussion of the difficult phrase 8.400 *suspiria fumant* is exemplary in this regard. Many notes concern Grecisms and adaptation of Greek literature, as one might have expected from Augoustakis' earlier *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past* (Leiden, 2014).

The commentary also frequently links Statius' mythological world to Flavian realia. Proserpina appears in the guise of an imperial administrator, noting the names of the dead on a doorpost (8.10–11). Discussion of Thiodamas' apparent hesitation at assuming Amphiarus' role (8.284–285) makes reference to the imperial convention of pretending to recuse power, as performed by Tiberius and Vespasian. Statius, however, compares Thiodamas' behavior to a Parthian prince's accession in a lengthy simile. Was this a tactful evasion of sensitive topics, such as the rumored tension between Titus and Domitian, or genuine admiration of a non-Roman people of contemporary interest? The commentary also presents exemplary short essays on brief passages, such as on the Thebans' use of their own past (8.229–236); on the nightingale and swallow simile (8.616–620); and on Minerva's self-purification in the book's final couplet.

The depth of Augoustakis' own learning suggests, however, that he could sometimes have been more selective about rehearsing others'. Vessey's critical framework for the *Thebaid* is now long out of date, and so it is not clear how it helps to label Dis and his attendants "baroque" (8.21–33). The citation of Masterson *in extenso* on 8.39–40 is unpersuasive. Viewing Dis as an editor of spectacles (as on 8.66–68) seems more plausible than as a belated poet-figure, third after his brothers as Statius is third after Homer and Virgil. Ahl (cited at 8.97–98) on the rape of Proserpina is similarly exaggerated: the gods typically perform terrible crimes with impunity, and Amphiarus means that he himself has not come as a rapist like Theseus.

There is very little to criticize in Augoustakis' scrupulous, learned, and creative examination of Statius. A bibliography divided into six sections puts unnecessary demands on the reader's patience. The commentary often resorts to

lengthy quotes where summary might have been more appropriate. *Nos, diua, grauaris?* (8.317) might suggest more than just the Homeric phrase “burden on the earth,” such as the tradition (found in the scholion to *Iliad* 1.5 and *Cypria* fr. 1 West) that Earth cried out to relieve her burden and Zeus responded with the Theban and Trojan wars. Reference to *Silvae* 5.3.213 *non uulgare loqui et famam sperare sepulcro* might have been expected in the discussion of *Theb.* 8.379, especially given the commentary’s interest in metapoetic readings. Any reader of Statius’ endlessly polysemous text will always find more potential connections to suggest, however, and Augoustakis’ *Thebaid 8* deserves the highest approbation from all readers of Flavian epic.

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