

BRUCE GIBSON, *Statius, Silvae 5*, edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, ISBN: 0-19-927715-X.

Bruce Gibson has done the study of Latin literature a service with his excellent commentary on Book 5 of Statius' *Silvae*. This is the first detailed study of Book 5 since Vollmer's (1898) general commentary on the entire work; it makes a worthy companion to Laguna Mariscal on Book 3, and Coleman on Book 4¹.

The book starts with a comprehensive introduction. As the majority of the poems of Book 5 are consolations, Gibson provides a helpful survey of the Greek and Latin consolatory tradition (xxxix-xxxiv). When he discusses the individual poems of Book 5 (xxxiv-1) he is thus able to demonstrate the distinctive character of Statius' poems. Some readers might feel that Gibson pushes too hard to prove that Statius' poems of self-consolation, 5.3 and 5.5, fail in their aim of consoling, for 5.5 is fragmentary and lacks a conclusion. However Gibson clearly shows that Statius has been wrongly overlooked in discussions of literary consolation; he is indeed, as Zablocki claimed many years ago, an important contributor to this poetic form².

Gibson also places the poems of Book 5 within the context of the *Silvae* as a whole (xviii-xxviii). His careful analysis of the 'poetics' of Statius' prefaces shows that the poet's self-deprecatory comments should not be taken at face value. Rather modesty is combined with assertiveness; as an epic poet who also wrote minor poetry Statius can claim distinguished company, including that of Virgil; he has high hopes for his *Silvae*. Given Gibson's

¹ G. Laguna Mariscal, *Estacio: Silvas III. Introducción, Edición Crítica, Traducción y Comentario*, Madrid 1992; K. M. Coleman, *Statius: Silvae IV*, Oxford 1988.

² S. Zablocki. "De Antiquorum Epicediis", *Eos* 56, 1966, 292-310.

recognition of the poet's elevated sense of worth, somewhat contradictory then is his hesitant remark that 'Staius is at least interested in stylistic refinement' (xxiii) and that certain passages 'might evoke a 'Callimachean' resonance' (xxvi). The examples he adduces belie his tentative approach. As a sophisticated writer steeped in Augustan poetry, Staius would have been well acquainted with Roman "Callimacheanism"³; in addition, as a writer from Naples trained by his father in classical and Hellenistic Greek poetry, his work, including the *Thebaid*, as McNelis has now shown, engaged directly and in a highly sophisticated manner with Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets⁴. Here Gibson could speak more confidently of the combination of Callimachean refinement and epic expansiveness that characterises the *Siluae*.

In the commentary, Gibson shows admirable clarity, learning and insight, and almost invariably addresses the many textual and interpretive problems these poems pose; he also brings light to cultural matters. Gibson largely follows Courtney's Oxford text, but he makes some judicious alterations⁵. Critics might not necessarily agree with every change; but Gibson supports his editorial choices with well-chosen literary parallels and a detailed discussion of the various readings proposed by other commentators along with their pros and the cons; his conclusions are based on interpretive as well as palaeographical considerations. Gibson draws on a wide range of commentators, mostly earlier but some contemporary. For instance, at 5.1.207 he argues for the reading *firmata*, proposed by Winterbottom, over Courtney's *firmanda*, on the grounds that a sense of obligation is not appropriate in the context.

Gibson's commentary ranges widely over Greek and Latin literature, and he draws suggestive parallels with other of the *Siluae* as well as with poets contemporary with Staius. References too

³ R. Hunter, *The Shadow of Callimachus: Studies in the Reception of Hellenistic Poetry at Rome*, Cambridge 2006.

⁴ C. McNelis, "Greek Grammarians and Roman Society during the Early Empire: Staius' Father and his Contemporaries", *CA* 21, 2002, 67-94; *Staius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War*, Cambridge 2007.

⁵ E. Courtney, *P. Papini Stati Siluae*, Oxford 1990.

to other literatures, eg. to the poetry of Quevedo (p. 382), delight and inform, reminding us in this instance of the important place the *Siluae* have held in Spanish culture, the archetypal copy (M), on which the survival of all the poems depended, having passed in the eighteenth century from the collection of the thirteenth conde de Miranda to the Biblioteca Nacional⁶. Cultural historians will find much to interest them here too. Gibson's note on funeral spices and perfumes (5.1.201-4) provides a useful corrective to the common practice of critics who attempt to identify particular fragrances from Statius' references to their geographical place names; 'Arabia' and 'India' are shorthand for a variety of spices and perfumes and evoke a luxurious context. The one section of the commentary that many might find controversial is his introduction to 5.3, where he discusses at length the date of Statius' father's death (pp. 261-6). Gibson follows Nauta in concluding that the lines which seem to contradict a secure dating before March 90 CE (225-33) were inserted later in a partial revision by the poet⁷. Arguing for a later insertion seems a desperate measure; Hardie's briefer discussion of the problem of dating remains the most convincing argument for a date that cannot ultimately be proved, given our reliance on purely literary testimony from the *Siluae*⁸.

In short, Gibson's commentary is richly informative and insightful on textual, literary and cultural matters, combining clarity and learning in equal measure. The care given this commentary extends to the editing. I have found few errors. At 5.1.150 we are referred to "228-9 below", a note which does not exist; at 5.1.254-7 Philetos should be meant, not Glaucias. At 5.535-7 "statements" is misspelled as "statments".

The book is attractively organised and laid out in clear type, with bold lemmata. The text has a facing translation. Statius is often regarded as a difficult and obscure poet, but Gibson's book,

⁶ See Gibson, li.

⁷ R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian*, Leiden 2002, 196-8.

⁸ A. Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae: Poets, Patrons and Epideixis in the Graeco-Roman World*, Liverpool 1983, 13-4.

with the clarity of its physical as well as its intellectual presentation, is aimed to help the student or the scholar. It should make Statius' *Siluae* much more accessible, thus facilitating further research on this important Latin poet and his lesser known works.

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