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*Publius Papinius Statius, The Thebaid: Seven against Thebes*  
(review)

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There are also some solecisms and misspellings, including (in both footnotes and bibliography) the names of scholars Antti Arjava and Henri Leclerq. The book would have benefitted from better proof-reading.

It is difficult to understand why this was published as a book and not as a shorter, more focused article. The authors claim that they wanted to make their work accessible to a larger audience than would read a classical journal. This is commendable, but surely that aim would have been better met by publishing a general article in a journal of social history (such as *Journal of Family History*), along with a more detailed analysis of the epigraphic question in a classical journal (as Melissa Aubin did in a critique of Shaw in *Ancient History Bulletin* 15 [2000] 1–13, apparently unknown to the authors). As it is, the weaknesses of this book clearly outweigh its strengths.

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CHARLES STANLEY ROSS, trans. *Publius Papinius Statius, The Thebaid: Seven against Thebes*. Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. xxxvii + 386. US \$55.00. ISBN 0-8018-6908-0.

Ross's work, following closely on Shackleton Bailey's 2003 prose translation and Melville's 1990 verse translation, is a testimony to the revived interest in Statius that has witnessed over the last two decades a doubling of the total number of available English versions of the poem. Ross's own view is that the *Thebaid's* popularity was, and still is, tied to tumultuous time, and Statius has special relevance to post-9/11 America: "There is, it seems, such a thing as too much success, as well as too much failure, whether in Rome two thousand years ago or today. Even unopposed power may be uneducated, unsteady, liable to new problems but old emotions. Humans are self-destructive; anger comes easily" (x).

The translation, based on Hill's edition, is prefaced with a 37-page introduction. The translation itself runs 354 pages, to which is appended a section of notes (355–376), an index of selected proper names (377–380), and an annotated bibliography (381–386). Before turning to examples of Ross's versification, I have some remarks to make on the components and structure of Ross's translation. Ross's introduction covers six topics: "Statius's Life" (xi–xiv), "Statius and Virgil" (xiv–xvi), "The Influence of the *Thebaid*" (xvi–xxvii), "Statius and his Poem" (xxvii–xxxii),

“Gender and Sexuality in the *Thebaid*” (xxxii–xxxiv), and “Translating Statius” (xxxiv–xxxvii). Two of these sections stand out. First, in “Statius’s Life,” Ross enlivens his biography of the poet by placing him within impressionistic sketches of Rome, created from details that have been culled from Statius’s *Silvae*. For example, he writes: “Everywhere we see the wealth of Rome, the vast reach of the empire, and its trade in gold, jewels, marble, exotic foods, wild animals, woods, cloth, and wines. Aqueducts carry water to the capital; fortresses protect its frontiers. Statius loved hot baths” (xii). Secondly, the largest section of the introduction, “The Influence of the *Thebaid*,” will be vital for any scholar assessing the importance of Statius to European literature. Ross’ handling of this enormous task is laudable, and this section might easily furnish an outline for another book. Ross’s “Notes” (drafted by Dr. C. Harrigan) and entries under “Selected Proper Names” are clear and concise and will be a definite boon to the reader approaching Statius for the first time. The 29 works of the “Selected Annotated Bibliography” seem judiciously chosen to encourage the reader to explore Statian scholarship pertaining to both the classical and the medieval world.

Ross also helps his reader navigate the *Thebaid* by the inclusion of a title and a summary for each book. This strategy is not entirely successful. Statius’s books tend not to be centered on one important event or pervaded by one theme only; although “Piety” is a suitable title for Book 12, there is much lost by naming Book 8 “Savage Hunger.” Tydeus does gnaw on the head of Melanippus at the close of the book (8.760–761), but his story makes up only the subject matter of 8.373–766. The first half of Book 8 details Amphiaraus’ arrival in the underworld (8.1–126), the election of Thiodamus, Amphiaraus’ replacement (8.127–270), and his *placatio telluris* (8.271–372). Ross’s chapter summaries will be useful for those who return to a book and need a reminder of its content. The reader, though, may well prefer Melville’s longer, lucid outlines, for little has been done to maintain the narrative line, and one may be misled initially into thinking that Statius has jumbled together a mass of scenes without care. Book 2 (“Ambush”) begins with the summary:

The ghost of Laius. Celebration of Bacchus at Thebes. Eteocles’ nightmare. Marriage negotiations in Argos. Weddings of Argia and Deipyle. An evil omen. The fatal necklace of Harmonia. Polynikes frets about exile. Tydeus insults Eteocles, who plots an ambush. Two brothers (sons of Ide) die one death. A memorial to Athena. (27)

“Translating Statius” clarifies Ross’s approach and prepares the reader for the kind of verse they will encounter. Three statements are particularly informative: first, “the present translation not only seeks to keep alive an ancient classic but to let readers and listeners understand

and experience Statius's art. I have tried to find a smooth modern syntax to render the high style, since Statius valued oration and pathos" (xxxv); secondly, "Throughout this translation I have relied on clarity to determine what could and could not be brought across the linguistic barrier from Latin to English. The point of my using a regular iambic pentameter line is that it is easy to follow" (xxxvi); and thirdly, concerning his use of the pentameter and the adornment of his verse, "The first foot, or iamb, is the exception to the rule that the stress falls on the even syllables. A stress on the first syllable instead of the second gives the line a strong beginning, thereby assisting the task of defining the verse line as a unit, something with a beginning, middle, and end. The real purpose of rhyme in English verse is not to jingle but to define the end of the line. I have therefore used rhyme whenever available, but also various types of assonance (matching vowel sounds) and consonance (similar consonants). Giving strength to the middle of the line is trickier. The best way is to be sure the line contains a verb, the strongest part of speech, but the middle of the line can also be strengthened by varying the pauses between syntactic units" (xxxvi).

While his methods are generally sound, they do raise some concerns. One pervasive result of Ross's approach is that, since his line is shorter than Statius's, whose verse is already compact, he needs to apply more artifice to his translation of a particular passage than may be present in the original. The inclusion of a verb to strengthen the line's middle also means many short sentences or clauses. This works well with the swift, excited moments of the *Thebaid*, which are plentiful, but not so well with subdued scenes. I agree with the author that one of the functions of rhyme is to mark the end of a line, but I believe that this is only valid if one's ear is accustomed to expect the rhyme by its frequent use—so that it becomes the verse standard. Ross's rhymes are rather sparse and amount to about one a page. Thus a couplet such as that which occurs at the close of Book 7, in a passage about Amphiarus driving his chariot into the underworld, "but just so, steered his chariot to hell: a last glimpse of the heavens, then he fell" (203), coming twelve lines after the closest imperfect rhyme ("war" and "labor" [203]) and a page from a short run of lines ending "split," "spit," "soldiers," "murmurs" (202), may indeed jingle and come across as trite rather than momentous. A similar undercutting of what should be a striking image—serious in tone—comes on 87 where Danaus is described as reveling in the sight of his murderous daughters: "This wickedness incites their father's praise; / he witnesses their swords through bloody doorways."

In other contexts the author does add charm to his verse with the inclusion of rhyme, especially where it is combined within an assonant passage or used in type-scenes. Parthenopaeus' advice on how his com-

rade should approach Atalanta with the news of her son's death provides an interesting example in which assonance holds the passage together and even subdues the rhyme:

I'm dying, Dorceus! Go console my mother  
 in her affliction. She, indeed—if worrying  
 can make one prophesy what's real—has seen  
 this sad truth in a vision or a dream.  
 But use pious fraud to ease her fears;  
 beguile her; do not suddenly appear  
 or come upon her when she holds a spear.  
 Then, when she has invited you to speak,  
 say ... (263)

In the stock descriptions of the passage of time, rhyme also seems to be beneficial in adding a softer tone and timelessness to the moment. The 10-line transition to night on page 69 starts with "On the steep margin of the western sea / the sun had set his flaming horses free." The assonance and alliteration draw the reader agreeably on (see also 142 and 264).

Next, to address the degree to which Ross is able to adapt Statius's technique, I provide several short examples of Statius's Latin alongside Ross's translations, and one longer passage which I feel underscores Ross's ability in handling impassioned speech. For the initial sections I have limited myself to the inclusion of Statius's Latin and Ross's translation, but for the longer passage Melville's, Mozley's, and Shackleton Bailey's translations are provided for those curious about the degree of similarity between their translations.

Statius describes Adrastus' daughters' initial reaction to seeing Polynikes and Tydeus, the men they are to marry, with two lines full of assonance and consonance, *pariter pallorque ruborque / purpureas hausere genas* (1.537–8), for which Ross has "they showed no impropriety / their cheeks blushed red and white with shy variety" (20). His rhyme and the repeated *i*'s do justice to Statius's ornate line.

At 2.415 Statius, after a simile in which Eteocles is compared to a snake, marks the initial words of the monarch with *s*'s, transferring the sound of the snake into the narrative: *cognita si dubiis fratris mihi iurgiasignis*. Ross applies the same technique: "were I have to suspected, by uncertain signs, / my brother's animosity towards me" (41–2).

He shows less skill at handling Statius's description of Perseus' mother anxiously watching the flight of her son at 3.464–5, where the repeated *r*'s, *p*'s, and *t*'s of Statius's *Persea, cum raptos pueri perterrita mater / prospexit*, create a shuddering sound. This effect seems lost in Ross's "his rapt steps terrified his mother / who observed him" (71). Ross's translation here also shows his occasional reliance on a Latin de-

rivative which clouds rather than clarifies Statius's meaning; "rapt" for *raptos* is apt to puzzle the reader.

Statius's *Thebaid* contains a number of compound words typical of epic. Ross's "boar-bearing Erymanthos and tintinnabulous-in-bronze Stymphalos" (93) preserves the bulky words and the order of Statius's *monstriferumque Erymanthon et aerisonum Stymphalon* (4.298) and provides a fine example of his sensitivity to their presence and their effect on a line.

At 5.3–4 Statius uses a predominantly dactylic line to capture the image of refreshed horses and reinvigorated men taking to the field: *acrior et campum sonipes rapit et pedes arua / implet ovans*. Ross is limited in his pentameter but makes good use of alliteration and the polysyllabic "rapidly" and "celebrating" to speed his lines along with the horses as well as to show the lighter spirit of the soldiers: "their horses now ran rapidly through meadows, / and celebrating soldiers filled the field" (114).

At 9.901–2 Parthenopaeus sends a lock of hair to his mother, and in a voice choked with sobs, replete with sorrowful *o*'s, states, *hunc toto capies pro corpore crinem*. Ross's "accept this lock in place of my whole body, / accept the tresses" (263), despite the repetition, seems to fall short of Statius's line.

Ross is, however, very successful in capturing the tone of 10.117, which is part of a simile that compares the overall effect of the halls of Sleep to a dying flame. Statius's ornate *languida succiduis expirant lumina flammis* has its rival in Ross's "languid light / falls from a fading flame and then expires" (268).

Generally, as has probably been gathered from the material above, lines which are dominated by repeated sounds are perfect for Ross's style. At 10.569 *attoniti et tantum matrum lamenta trementes* provides a final example of his skill: "they felt the fright / arising from their mournful mothers' cries" (400).

Finally, the author's own wit may occasionally be found in his translations. These will either amuse or distress the reader. The description of Amphiarus, whose helmet is wreathed with a crown of olive branches (4.217), becomes "olives wiggled his helmet" (90), and for a murderous exchange of missiles at 8.414 we have "some perished in the serve, some in the volley" (218).

As mentioned, one of Ross's strengths is in his handling of the highly charged scenes that are so common in Statius. I turn now to 2.452–7, representing approximately one third of Tydeus' denunciation of king Eteocles, who refuses to return the Theban throne to Polynikes. Ross's translation captures the rage, violence, and energy of the original. Compare Statius'

“reddes.”

ingeminat, “reddes; non si te ferreus agger  
ambiat aut triplices alio tibi carmine muros  
Amphion auditus agat, nil tela nec ignes  
obstiterint, quin ausa luas nostrisque sub armis  
captive moribundus humum diademate pulses. ...

with Ross’s

You *will* surrender!  
You will surrender power! If iron walls  
encircled you, or if Amphion sang  
a second song and mounded triple ramparts,  
not fire or sword could save you! You will pay  
for your impertinence, and you will strike  
your crown against the earth before you die. ... (43)

Melville, who also chose the iambic pentameter for his translation, has

“You shall yield,” he cried, “Yes, yield!  
Though iron ramparts ring you, though Amphion  
Should sing another song and raise for you  
A triple bulwark, neither fire nor sword  
Shall save you. You shall pay, and as you die,  
Our captive, beat the dust with your fine crown. ... (44)

For prose, there is Shakleton Bailey’s forceful

“You shall return it” and again “Return it you shall. Though  
an iron rampart surround you or Amphion with another song  
be heard and make you triple walls, neither steel nor fire shall  
protect you from the price of your deeds as you die beneath  
our arms, striking the ground with captive diadem. ... (129)

And lastly, for those preferring Mozley’s archaic language for rendering epic, there is

“Thou shalt restore,” he cries, and again, “Thou shalt restore!  
Nay, should an iron rampart fence thee, or Amphion with the  
strains of another song draw about thee a triple wall, in no  
wise shall fire or sword defend thee from paying for thy bold  
deed, and, ere thou die, beating thy captive diadem on the  
ground beneath our arms. ... (429)

Ross’s translation, all told, is excellent. My concern over his choice of the iambic pentameter, his summaries, and his use of rhyme, fall in the shadow of the work as a whole. Ross handles Statius’s poetic technique with skill and quite often is able to represent in English Statius’s epic diction, alliteration, assonance, and consonance. Ross’s readers will definitely experience, in the translation’s fierce pace and high energy,

the impact of the original.

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GABOR BETEGH. *The Derveni Papyrus. Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xii + 441. ISBN 0-521-80108-7. US \$110.00.

L'ouvrage de Gábor Betegh représente désormais un outil précieux pour tous ceux qui souhaitent aborder et mieux comprendre les questions posées par un texte aussi difficile et complexe que celui du papyrus de Derveni. Ce papyrus, le plus ancien des papyri grecs connus, a été découvert en 1962 à Derveni, dans le nord de la Grèce, et contient, en 26 colonnes, le commentaire allégorique d'une cosmo-théogonie en vers explicitement attribuée à Orphée ; le rouleau, trouvé carbonisé, auprès d'une tombe parmi les objets votifs inhumés, pourrait être daté du milieu du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C., une date exceptionnellement haute. Son importance pour la philosophie et la religion grecque, notamment du point de vue de leur rapport étroit, est bien établie depuis sa découverte ; néanmoins, il ne bénéficie toujours pas d'une édition officielle complète et fiable.

L'ouvrage de Betegh, qui constitue le remaniement de sa thèse de doctorat, est le premier livre consacré à l'étude du papyrus après celui de Laks et Most qui, en 1997, publièrent une traduction anglaise de l'ensemble, accompagnée d'une série d'études importantes sur son contenu (A. Laks and G.W. Most, eds., *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, Oxford, 1997). De manière très systématique et claire, Betegh procède à l'édition, la traduction et l'interprétation détaillée, en dix chapitres, des extraits de cette version de la cosmo-théogonie orphique, la plus ancienne qui nous est parvenue, ainsi que de son commentaire, très particulier, par l'auteur du papyrus.

En ce qui concerne le texte grec ancien lui-même, qui couvre la première partie du livre, il est précisé, dans la note explicative qui le précède, que le texte reconstitué « makes no claim to be a critical edition » (p. 1). L'objectif principal de Betegh est de proposer à son tour une solution à divers points controversés, soit en avançant ses propres conjectures et leçons, soit en choisissant parmi celles des autres chercheurs, en indiquant les alternatives dans l'apparat critique, dans l'attente de l'édition définitive du papyrus par le professeur grec K. Tsantsanoglou