

INTRODUCTION¹

Three of Statius' works have come down to us: the *Thebaid*, an epic in 12 books; the *Silvae*, a collection of occasional poems that he published in four books, with a fifth book likely published posthumously;² and a little more than one book of the *Achilleid*, an epic that was probably left incomplete at his death. In addition, Juvenal refers to a work known as the *Agave*³ and Georgius Valla refers to a *Bellum Germanicum* in his commentary on Juvenal.⁴

There is no ancient biography of Statius and very few details can be corroborated through the testimony of others. What we know of Statius' life is induced from a few passages in the *Silvae*, predominantly in 5.3, although external evidence is occasionally asserted.⁵ There continues to be some debate on his biography, fueled by how autobiographically the *Silvae* are read, what connections are drawn between different passages, and what chronology is assumed. As it is not my intention to present all aspects of the debate here, the following discussion presents briefly the points that are needed to understand matters that arise in the manuscripts.⁶

The son of an immigrant from Velia (5.3.127: *Hyele* [*sele* mss.]) in Magna Graecia, Statius was born in Naples in about AD 45.⁷ His father, probably also named P. Statius, became a celebrated poet and *grammaticus* in Naples, perhaps even teaching members of the Flavian household. Statius the son learned from his father and became a celebrated poet in his native Naples, winning a prize at the Augustalia festival while still young. He later moved to Rome, where he won a crown at the Alban games and took part in the Capitoline contests, but without success.

Under the influence of his father, who died shortly after the project began,⁸ Statius began writing the *Thebaid*, which he published in 90 or 91 after 12 years' toil.⁹ He then began publish-

¹ An index to this section is at the end of this volume.

² See Vollmer 1898.3 nr. 7; L. Legras, "Les dernières années de Stace," *REA* 9 (1907), 338–49 and 10 (1908), 34–70; and the introduction to H. Cancik, *Untersuchungen zur lyrischen Kunst des P. Papinius Statius*, Spudasmata 13 (Hildesheim, 1965).

³ *Sat.* 7.86. On the basis of Juvenal's reference to Paris, a well-known actor (or, possibly, a common stage name) during Domitian's time, scholars have assumed that this refers to a lost pantomime. Since Agave was the daughter of Cadmus, it is possible that this is an oblique reference to the *Thebaid*; this is argued in some late-medieval and early-modern sources, such as the annotator of München, BSB, Inc. 2^o c.a. 1952 and Domitius Calderinus, who glosses *Agauen* as *carmen Thebanum* in his commentary on the *Thebaid* (*ed. pr.* 1475).

⁴ See below, p. XVIII. *Editio princeps* Piacenza, 1486 (Hain 9703*). Where Valla got the quote from is unclear. His personal manuscript collection, which passed through the hands of Albertus Pius and his nephew Rudolf Pius, came ultimately to the Biblioteca Estense in Modena, but I, like scholars before me, could find no trace among any of the fragments, in the manuscripts identified as having belonged to Valla, or in any of the Juvenal manuscripts there. It was thought that Valla invented the passage until O. Jahn ("Vermischtes," *RHM* 9 [1854], 627 nr. 5) argued that Statius alludes to the work at *Silv.* 4.2.64–67. On the fragment, see F. Beuchler, "Coniectanea," *RHM* 39 (1884), 283–85 nr. 7; J.G. Griffith, "Juvenal, Statius, and the Flavian Establishment," *G&R* 16 (1969), 134–50; G.B. Townend, "The Literary Substrata to Juvenal's Satires," *JRS* 63 (1973), 148–60; G. Aricò, "De Statii carminis, quod de bello germanico inscribitur, fragmento," *ALGP* 11–13 (1974–76 [1977]), 249–54; V. Tandoi, "Per la comprensione del De bello Germanico staziano muovendo dalla parodia di Giovenale," *Disiecti membra poetarum* 2 (1986), 223–34; and J. Adamietz, "Zur Frage der Parodie in Juvenals 4. Satire," *WJA* 19 (1993), 185–200.

⁵ Cf. K. Clinton, "Publius Papinius St[---] at Eleusis," *TAPhA* 103 (1972), 79–82.

⁶ Most editions since Vollmer 1898 contain a more complete chronology.

⁷ The date of his birth is inferred. His father died at the age of AD 65 shortly after our Statius began the *Thebaid*, probably in 80–81, implying that he was born ca. AD 15. Statius suggests that he himself lived into old age ("senium," *S.* 3.5.13), yielding a practical range—with room for poetic license—of AD 35 to 56 for his birth, although some have argued for a date as late as 61. See F. Speranza, "Note sulla cronologia di P. Papinio Stazio," *AFLN* 7 (1957), 107–16.

⁸ *Silv.* 5.3.233–34. To what degree this is accurate and to what degree filial flattery is unclear.

⁹ The number is likely an exaggeration, based on details from Virgil's life.