

*si parva licet componere magnis: the statue-poems of Statius' Silvae*

Praise for Domitian in Statius' *Silvae* has caused great scholarly debate. Ahl, most prominently, thinks that any excessive praise cannot be sincere and so must be subversive. In order to gather more information about the nature of Domitianic praise in the *Silvae*, this paper will compare two poems which both take a statue as their theme. *Silvae* 1.1 and 4.6 are the only statue-poems in the collection, and together form the first and last of the poems describing objects. Though for different addressees and occasions, these two poems show many similarities. A detailed comparison will hopefully shed some light on any differences between imperial and private praise in the *Silvae*.

One example of the differences between the two poems is their generic associations. *Silvae* 1.1 has some epic overtones and is a noisy poem. The construction of the statue generated a lot of noise (1.1.63-4); Curtius is awakened by the din of the building (1.1.66-69). Noise can sometimes be negative: McNelis recalls Callimachus' scorn for noisy poetry (*Aetia* 1.1.29-32) (McNelis 2007: 73). This does not mean, however, that Statius is casting a negative valuation on the construction of the statue or that 1.1 is entirely "epic." The poem certainly shows the aesthetics of Statius' own reductive style poetics. Just as Lysippus confined such a huge spirit into such a small statue, likewise Statius performs a similar feat in *Silvae* 1.1.

In comparison to *Silvae* 1.1, 4.6 is more subdued. In place of epic, we find Horatian allusions. The very dinner invitation and party, including conversation is reminiscent of Horace. This air of intimacy is perfectly suited to the context. Just as 1.1 exalted leadership in peace and war, so 4.6 exalts the joys of friendship. The atmosphere of the dinner party also recalls Catullus 50, providing a neoteric tone. The small, neat and recherché description of the evening thus aligns with that of the art of the statue itself (McNelis (2008) 261). Again, Statius uses the appropriate poetic source and tone for the occasion and addressee.

Both statues represent something of Statius' own poetry. 1.1 is epic in scale, but, as we have seen, plays with the idea of 'big into small', as does Lysippus' statuette. It is 4.6, particularly, that resembles Statius' own poetics. The statue itself is small, something of a novelty, and displays cultural learning. Statius describes the statuette in ways that recall his own poetics, and his poetic achievements. Brontes could not have made the statue, and thus Statius rejects heroic ideals while choosing small-scale artistry. The small size of the Hercules statue reflects Statius' own poetics and his privileging of small-scale artistry. The setting of the poem reflects Statius' use of Callimachean and neoteric ideals in his own poetry.

Through a close examination of two poems related in theme but different in tone and setting, this paper aims to show that praise for Domitian is significantly similar to the praise for Vindex both in the topics for praise and in how Statius treats the opportunities for praise. Where praise differs it seems to be a result of the obvious differences in the characters and their imperial or private setting. Under the Flavian ideology there are certain methods and topics for praise which are simply not appropriate for a private *amicus*, and vice versa. It can be seen, however, that Statius uses each occasion as an opportunity to display his own poetics, and is able to apply his particular aesthetic to each situation.

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