Ut pictura poesis: Text, Image, and Intermediality in Roman Receptions of the Trojan War

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ABSTRACT

The Roman Empire was a richly interconnected intermedial cultural landscape in which visual and literary media were not parallel modes of communication but mutually informing practices. Although scholarship has increasingly recognised the importance of intermediality in the ancient world, particularly through the works of Michael Squire and Jaś Elsner, visual and literary evidence frequently continues to be analysed in isolation. This thesis advances these discussions by demonstrating the interpretative value of analysing texts and images in conjunction. It argues that Roman literary texts were produced, encountered, and interpreted within a broader culture of viewing, and that aspects of their meaning become visible only when they are restored to that visual context.

Focusing on Roman receptions of the Trojan War between the first and third centuries CE, this thesis examines three intermedial case studies: the *Ilias Latina* alongside the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*; Statius' *Achilleid* alongside Pompeiian wall paintings of Achilles on Skyros; and Philostratus' *Heroicus* alongside statues and iconographic representations of Protesilaus. These case studies encompass different chronological and geographical contexts, languages, literary genres, visual media, scales, and degrees of explicit intermedial engagement. Their diversity demonstrates that the interaction between reading and viewing formed a pervasive feature of Roman literary culture. The Trojan War provides a particularly productive nexus for this investigation. In the centuries following the *Aeneid*, its myths circulated extensively across literary and visual media and provided Roman audiences with a shared repertoire through which questions of cultural identity, memory, genre, and the relationship between past and present could be explored.

The progression across the three case studies is cumulative, moving from the organisation of narrative, through the encounter between viewer and viewed, to the cultural association between sight and truth. The first chapter demonstrates how the compression, arrangement, and visual organisation of Trojan War narrative encourage teleological and Romanising interpretations centred increasingly upon Aeneas. The second turns from the organisation of what is seen to the act of seeing itself, showing how networks of spectatorship around Achilles illuminate the poem's manipulation of epic and elegiac conventions. The third examines the authority attributed to vision, arguing that the *Heroicus* and the material and iconographic traditions surrounding Protesilaus reveal how the apparent persuasive force of objects, bodies, and eyewitness experience can be transferred to literary representation.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate that visuality fundamentally informed Roman practices of reading and literary interpretation. Correspondences, divergences, and complementary emphases between texts and images reveal processes through which myth was organised, viewed, interpreted, and authorised across media. By tracing this progression from visual arrangement, through spectatorship, to the authority of sight, the thesis argues that intermedial reading provides a means of recovering the broader visual culture within which Roman literature constructed meaning.

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CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis, I have referred to the Homeric hero by his Latin name, Ulysses, to respect the Latin texts. In Chapter Three, however, I adopt the Greek Odysseus to better reflect the language and literary context of the *Heroicus*.

Wherever possible, my abbreviations follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

INTRODUCTION

> Πλὴν ὁ Σιμωνίδης τὴν μὲν ζῳγραφίαν ποίησιν σιωπῶσαν προσαγορεύει, τὴν δὲ ποίησιν ζῳγραφίαν λαλοῦσαν. ἃς γὰρ οἱ ζῳγράφοι πράξεις ὡς γιγνομένας δεικνύουσι, ταύτας οἱ λόγοι γεγενημένας διηγοῦνται καὶ συγγράφουσιν. εἰ δ᾽ οἱ μὲν χρώμασι καὶ σχήμασιν, οἱ δ᾽ ὀνόμασι καὶ λέξεσι ταὐτὰ δηλοῦσιν, ὕλῃ καὶ τρόποις μιμήσεως διαφέρουσι, τέλος δ᾽ ἀμφοτέροις ἓν ὑπόκειται, καὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν κράτιστος ὁ τὴν διήγησιν ὥσπερ γραφὴν πάθεσι καὶ προσώποις εἰδωλοποιήσας (Plut. *De glor. Ath*. 346F-347A).
>
> Simonides, however, calls painting inarticulate poetry and poetry articulate painting: for the actions which painters portray as taking place at the moment literature narrates and records after they have taken place. Even though artists with colour and design, and writers with words and phrases, represent the same subjects, they differ in the material and the manner of their imitation; and yet the underlying end and aim of both is one and the same; the most effective historian is he who, by a vivid representation of emotions and characters, makes his narration like a painting.

Reading and viewing in the Roman world were overlapping cultural practices. Literary texts formed only one part of a broader representational environment populated by paintings, sculpture, monuments, inscriptions, performances, architecture, and material objects. Meanwhile, these visual representations were themselves encountered by audiences whose interpretation had been shaped by literary and other cultural traditions. Mythological narratives in particular circulated between these different forms. The same heroes, episodes, and stories could be encountered in poetry and prose, on walls, in relief and sculpture, and through a range of public and private objects. Verbal and visual media therefore participated within the same shared traditions of representation, continuously functioning as interpretative resources for the other. Audiences brought knowledge accumulated through different forms of cultural experience to subsequent acts of reading and viewing. Familiarity acquired through literature could shape the interpretation of an image, just as familiarity with visual representations could inform the reading of a literary text. The interpretative inventory through which a familiar myth, character, or narrative was understood could therefore be simultaneously literary and visual.

This thesis argues, then, that Roman literary texts were produced, encountered, and interpreted within a broader intermedial culture of reading and viewing. Roman literature cannot be fully understood in isolation from contemporary visual culture, just as visual

representations did not exist independently of the literary traditions with which their audiences were familiar. This thesis investigates how Roman literary texts and visual representations work together to construct meaning, arguing that an intermedial approach reveals aspects of Roman literary interpretation that remain invisible when texts or images are studied in isolation.

This argument extends beyond the assertion that literary texts and visual representations can usefully be studied alongside one another, and instead explores the insights gained when the practices associated with viewing and visual representations are applied to literary texts and interpretation. Visual media make certain interpretative strategies, such as framing, scale, centrality, perspective, spatial organisation, and narrative sequencing, particularly conspicuous. Applying the analysis of these processes to both media provides a means of returning to literary texts with a set of different and underutilised questions. Therefore, the central focus of this thesis is to demonstrate what becomes newly visible in literature when modes of viewing are also applied as modes of reading.

Three case studies develop this argument cumulatively. The thesis begins by asking how visual principles can organise narrative, then moves to the relationship between viewer and viewed, and finally to the authority that can be attributed to sight itself. Across Aeneas, Achilles, and Protesilaus, visuality consequently develops from a principle of formal organisation to a mechanism of interpretation, and ultimately to a means through which claims to knowledge and truth can be constructed.

Visuality and Intermedial Cultural Experience in the Roman World

The study of intermediality in this thesis is not simply a modern methodological approach but seeks to reflect the intermedial conditions of the Roman cultural experience. In the Roman world, reading and viewing were rarely distinct activities. Rather, texts and images occupied the same physical, social, and intellectual spaces, interacting with one another within a broader cultural landscape in which acts of reading and viewing repeatedly intersected. Visual and literary culture should therefore not be conceived as

separate systems in which one merely provides context for the other; each could shape the interpretative knowledge brought to subsequent encounters across media.

Some ancient authors repeatedly privilege vision as the most powerful of the senses, while rhetorical theory sought to produce vividness (*enargeia*) capable of making audiences mentally 'see' absent events.[1] Aristotle argues in the *Metaphysics* that "we prefer sight, generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason for this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions." (*Metaph.* 1.1.980a 24-28).[2] Such evidence suggests that visuality functioned not only as a property of artworks but as a fundamental cultural framework through which Romans understood the world around them. Roman public and private spaces also brought through combinations of architecture, sculpture, painting, monuments, inscriptions, objects, and performance into constant conjunction. Images were encountered in sanctuaries and civic spaces, in houses and gardens, on tombs and public monuments, on coins and portable objects. Text and image occupied the same cultural landscape and were not parallel systems of communication. Within this landscape, they could interact, reinforce, reinterpret, and challenge one another, while knowledge acquired through one medium could participate in the interpretation of another.

Myth was particularly well suited to such movement between forms. Mythic episodes and characters did not belong exclusively to literary texts but existed within a broader intermedial economy in which a figure, episode, a specific moment, or even a pose could activate the knowledge of a more extensive narrative. Particular familiarity with a narrative could allow individual representations to abbreviate, rearrange, omit, or place emphasis on various moments of meaning without reproducing their larger traditions in full. *Paideia* was particularly important to this process because this type of familiarity with myth and the ability to recognise it signalled erudition and cultural

[1] Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.29-32; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2; Dion. Hal. *Lys*. 7.

[2] Translated by Hugh Tredennick; Additional ancient instances where sight is discussed as a key proponent for truth or knowledge (to be discussed at greater length in due course): Arist. *Sens*. 436b-437a; Polyb. 12.27.1; Hdt. 2.106, 2.156, 2.148; Thuc. 1.22; Diog. Laert. 7.49-54; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.5.15, 2.15.40; Cic. *De or*. 3.40.161, 2.87.357; Pl. *Resp.* 6. 507b-509c, 7. 514a-520a; Pl. *Tht*. 151e; Pl. *Ti.* 45b-47b; Pl. *Soph*. 264a-266d; On the supremacy of sight in Greek theories of perception and knowledge: Gosling 1973: 120-139; Jonas 1982: 135-152; Jay 1993: 21-31; and Bartsch 2006: 15-17, 42-77.

competence.[3] Greek myth and poetry remained fundamental to education and the display of sophistication within the Roman Empire, and these inherited stories were continuously adapted for their contemporary contexts. Therefore, the texts examined within this thesis assume a reader/viewer capable of recognising and engaging with this material in a sophisticated and educated manner. However, this does not suggest that mythological literary and visual culture were confined to the elite, or to one uniform Roman interpreter. Rather, it posits that literary interpretation of this kind depended on varying forms of cultural knowledge and input, including a level of familiarity with Greek myth, literary and visual precedent, and in some cases, rhetorical practice.

Ancient reception, therefore, was also intermedial. New encounters with myth took place against an accumulated background of earlier literary, visual, and material versions. Visual representations could use spatial hierarchy, synoptic glance, or gaze to make meaning clear, while sculpture could utilise material presence and embodied encounters to provide a sense of authority to the depicted figure. Likewise, textual narrative could exploit temporality, structure, and proportion in ways unavailable to a visual representation. Meaning emerges through the capacity of audiences to recognise, compare, and reconstitute culturally familiar material across these different forms. One's encounter with Achilles, for example, may be shaped by Homer, but also by a broader accumulation of other literary successors, or recognisable narrative moments or attributes within paintings, or statues. This ability to recognise him through both acts of reading and visual familiarity forms a wider cultural reciprocal repertoire which could be used to shape and enrich interpretation of subsequent encounters with the myth across different media.

The practice of reading itself should likewise be situated within this wider intermedial framework. Literary texts might be read privately, read aloud, recited, discussed, memorised, and excerpted. Often, visual and material culture played a part in this interpretative process. Texts could be read (or encountered aurally) within highly decorated rooms of the house, adorned with visual tellings of the same myth or story.

[3] Newby 2016: 137-163; Whitmarsh 2001: 90-129; Morgan 1998.

Equally, the material representation may have contradicted the literary, informing a unique interpretation by the viewer/reader. Here, these practices overlap. To understand literary interpretation as parallel to, rather than intersecting with, the visual culture in which it was situated risks overlooking the broader repertoire that informed this interpretation. Therefore, intermediality recognises that each medium could operate as interpretative context for the other, and that meaning could be generated through the movement between them.

In Scholarship

The relationship between text and image in antiquity has been the subject of sustained scholarly attention over the past several decades. As a result, approaches that have treated literary and visual evidence as parallel fields of study have been fundamentally challenged. Jaś Elsner, in his *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* and *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, has emphasised the active role that a spectator possessed in producing meaning – the act of viewing is placed within its religious, social, spatial, and ideological contexts.[4] *Roman Eyes*, in particular, reads visual objects alongside literary texts in an exploration of Roman visuality and subjective interpretation.[5] David Fredrick has similarly explored the concept of gaze and spectatorship as a form of power between the viewer and the viewed, while other scholarship concerned with Roman domestic spaces has investigated images' roles within larger architectural and decorative program (rather than functioning as stand-alone representations).[6] When combined, these strands of scholarship demonstrate that viewing in the Roman Empire was an active practice that was informed by the specific context, as well as the cultural knowledge and expectations brought by the individual viewer.

Furthermore, edited collections, such as Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne's *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, as well as Elsner's *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, have contested previous approaches in which images have been subordinated to literary

[4] Elsner 1995; Elsner 2007.
[5] Elsner 2007: 67-110, as a particular example.
[6] Fredrick 2002; Bergmann 1994: 225-256; Wallace-Hadrill 1994.

works and treated as illustrations.[7] Michael Squire's *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* has been especially influential in examining the distinction between text and image, and demonstrating the reciprocal processes by which visual and verbal media construct and engage with one another.[8] Squire's work has been particularly relevant to this thesis as he asserts the multi-directional nature of the relationship between text and image. Just as images do not simply illustrate texts, nor do texts merely function to explain images. Rather, the interpretation of each medium is generated through engagement with the possibilities and limitations of the other. His comprehensive work on the *Tabulae Iliacae*, namely, *The Iliad in a Nutshell: Visualising Epic on the Tabulae Iliacae*, demonstrates the sophistication of the process of combining visual and verbal in antiquity.[9]

Squire has also been particularly influential in identifying the extent to which modern divisions within Classical Studies have encouraged material and literary evidence to be treated as belonging to separate interpretative domains. In his study of the *Tabulae Iliacae*, he attributes their earlier scholarly marginalisation in part to divisions between Greek and Roman material, art history and archaeology, archaeology and philology, and, more fundamentally, to an enduring separation between the study of ancient 'material' and 'literary' cultures.[10] Such divisions are especially consequential for objects such as the *Tabulae Iliacae*, whose significance depends precisely upon the interaction of visual and literary forms. Likewise, Squire notes that the close correspondence between details have been the criterion against which interaction is measured: similarity is treated as evidence of connection, while divergence is taken to suggest that verbal and visual traditions have formed independently.[11] Overall, Squire's argument extends beyond the tablets to expose and challenge the ways that the organisation of modern disciplines have determined the relationship between text and image within scholarly

[7] Goldhill and Osborne 1994; Elsner 1996.
[8] Squire 2009; Squire 2014, 2015.
[9] Squire 2011. Also, Squire 2010.
[10] Squire 2011: 16-17, 372.
[11] Squire 2011: 141-143.

understanding. An example of this is Jocelyn Penny Small, who emphasised the distinct and parallel transmission of stories in literary and visual traditions.[12]

A corresponding body of scholarship has demonstrated that visuality is already deeply embedded within literary practice. Studies of ekphrasis have been especially important in challenging beliefs of the parallel worlds of reading and viewing. Ruth Webb's *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* has demonstrated that ekphrasis belonged to a rhetorical culture in which verbal representation sought to make absent subjects present before the mind of the reader.[13] The role that verbal techniques, such as *enargeia*, play, serves as proof that theories of language in antiquity conceptualised verbal representation through analogies with vision. Goldhill has similarly explored how ekphrastic viewing shapes interpretation, focussing on the role of the knowledgeable spectator.[14] Helen Lovatt's *The Epic Gaze* extends this enquiry beyond ekphrasis and looks at acts of looking throughout ancient epic.[15]

Scholarship on mythological imagery has focussed on processes of viewing within specific cultural environments in Roman Imperial life. Zahra Newby's *Greek Myths in Roman Art and Culture*: *Imagery, Values and Identity in Italy, 50 BC-AD 250*, for example, investigates myth's role as a flexible cultural inventory that was repeatedly adapted within Roman social contexts, as opposed to being a mere collection of stories represented across different media. Newby examines Greek myth across public, domestic, and funerary settings, and connected the interpretation of this myth with *paideia*, rhetoric, and self-representation.[16] This argument participates in the wider re-evaluation of Roman domestic visual culture, in which mythological wall-painting and decoration is understood as an active participant in the social and intellectual environment of the house.[17]

[12] Small 2003.
[13] Webb 2009.
[14] Goldhill 2018: 213-239; Goldhill 2007: 1-19.
[15] Lovatt 2013.
[16] Newby 2016: esp. 137-163.
[17] Bergmann 1994: 225-256; Wallace-Hadrill 1994.

These developments have substantially transformed the study of Roman visual and literary culture. Scholarship has demonstrated that viewing is a culturally conditioned practice that influences interpretation. In other words, verbal and visual media participate together in a joint process of meaning-making. This scholarship is important for this thesis as it establishes that literary education, rhetorical training, and repeated encounters with myth in both literary and visual forms contributed to a shared cultural framework in which individual representations were recognised and interpreted. Familiar figures and episodes invoked traditions that extended beyond the immediate text or object in question.

Research Questions and Original Contribution

This thesis, therefore, seeks to build upon scholarly recognition of the reciprocal relationship between ancient visual and verbal cultures. Despite these developments, a further investigation remains underexplored in this discussion. As Squire and Elsner have recently observed in their survey of Latin literature and visual culture, there remains a reluctance to move fully across the domains of art and text, and to account for the reciprocal dynamics between text and image, despite the now extensive scholarship dedicated to the interactions between visual and verbal media.[18] A useful example is Lovatt's *The Epic Gaze*, which demonstrates the interpretative importance of vision and spectatorship across Greek and Roman epic, but remains principally focussed upon visuality *within* literary texts. Visual theories and practices are consequently brought to bear upon literature without visual representations themselves being used extensively as independent evidence.

Consequently, scope remains to ask the question – what do these intermedial insights mean for the interpretation of literary texts themselves? If modes of viewing formed part of the cultural and erudite understanding of Roman audiences, then practices made particularly prominent in visual media (framing, scale, material presence, spatial

[18] Squire and Elsner 2024: 618.

organisation, sequencing, perspective, and gaze) also provide categories with which literary works can be re-evaluated. This thesis, then, seeks to move beyond intermedial comparison towards a sustained study of intermedial interpretation. This thesis, therefore, seeks not simply to demonstrate how text and image illuminate one another, but to focus on what becomes newly visible in our understanding of literature when modes and practices of viewing are applied to text as interpretative tools. Although the relationship between literary and visual culture is reciprocal, the particular emphasis of this thesis is literary: it asks how visual knowledge and habits of viewing could participate in the interpretation and production of literary meaning.

The title of this thesis draws inspiration from Horace's well-known assertion – *ut pictura poesis* – that is "as is painting, so is poetry" (*Ars P.* 361). Horace distinguishes works according to the specific situations in which viewers encounter and interpret them: "one strikes your fancy more, the nearer you stand; another, the farther away. This courts the shade, that will wish to be seen in the light, and dreads not the critic insight of the judge. This pleased but once; that, though ten times called for, will always please" (*Ars. P.* 361-365).[19] This analogy thus places the reader of poetry in a strikingly similar position to that of a viewer of art, whose interpretation is shaped by factors such as distance, perspective, scale, repetition, and circumstances of viewing. The significance of the analogy here lies less in establishing that reading and viewing were exactly equivalent than in demonstrating how visual experience could provide a framework through which literary reception could also be conceptualised. Additionally, in the *Odes*, Horace makes the relationship between literary and material representation more explicit. At *Carm.* 3.30.1, he declares that he has completed a *monumentum aere perennius*: a monument more lasting than bronze, and he imagines the enduring survival of his poetry when compared with the pyramids, corroded and destroyed by the rain, winds, passing of the years and the flight of time (*Carm.* 3.30.1-5). Here, Horace asserts the endurance of poetry by conceiving of it in material terms, locating his literary achievement within the physical and visual landscape of Rome. Read together, these two passages of Horace encapsulate the premise of this thesis. Authors of Roman literature conceptualise their

[19] Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough.

written works through visual and material forms, while visual culture participates in the same networks of memory, representation, and interpretation. Here, *ut pictura poesis* invites us to ask what happens when the conditions of viewing are applied to the practices of reading.

Methodology

This thesis builds upon the established scholarly recognition that ancient visual and verbal texts functioned in conjunction by exploring the new interpretative insights gained for Roman literature. To do so, this thesis adopts an intermedial methodology, bringing literary and visual representations into sustained dialogue. It does so through three case studies, each of which pairs a literary text with a corresponding visual representation. These pairings are connected through their shared mythological subject matter, but also through shared modes of visual organisation. Chapter One focusses on the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* and the role of features such as miniaturisation and scale, centrality, and repetition, while Chapter Two takes Statius' *Achilleid* and Pompeiian wall paintings of Achilles on Skyros and examines the dynamics of gaze and spectatorship. Chapter Three reads Philostratus' *Heroicus* alongside the iconography of Protesilaus to reveal the role of vision in autopsy, *enargeia*, and authority. The aim of these pairings is not simply to identify similarities and differences between texts and images, but to examine how each medium can shape the interpretation of the other. It also considers how readers accustomed to encountering myth through images, monuments, objects, and performances might bring culturally acquired visual expectations to their encounters with literary texts.

The following related questions guide the study and seek to establish how modes and practices of viewing themselves function as modes of literary analysis:

- What does the visual evidence encourage us to notice differently in the text?
- What does the text invite its audience to visualise?
- How does each medium organise and direct attention?
- What becomes visible only when literary and visual representations are considered together?

Importantly, this methodology does not necessarily always suggest a direct or conscious relationship between specific visual objects and literary texts. Shared subject matter or chronological proximity does not in itself establish that an author encountered a specific artwork, nor does this argument depend upon such a relationship. Visual representations, for the most part, are instead treated as evidence for broader iconographic traditions. Though this thesis is limited in scope to this corpus of works, its implications can extend well beyond these individual works. This thesis, therefore, intends to demonstrate that the broader interpretative potential of an intermedial approach can be applied widely within this Roman visual cultural landscape and that its application is not confined to works of art and text in deliberate communication with one another.

Corpus, Scope, and Structure

The corpus of this thesis does not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of the relationship between text and image across the Graeco-Roman world. Instead, the three case studies share a common mythological framework, but differ in literary genre, visual medium, historical context, and conditions of viewing. This allows the thesis to test the same methodological approach across a range of different circumstances.

As previously discussed, myth provides an especially productive corpus for this form of investigation because of its extensive circulation across media. Within this broader field, the thesis focuses specifically on Roman receptions of the Trojan War. The Trojan cycle is especially well suited to intermedial analysis because of the combination of cultural familiarity and widespread representation that characterises its reception. Homeric epic supplied an exceptionally influential narrative framework, but the stories and figures associated with Troy were repeatedly reimagined in later literature and visual culture. Such familiarity is important – when an audience possesses prior knowledge of a narrative, individual works can compress, omit, isolate, rearrange, or refocus material more successfully while remaining recognisable. Within this process, omissions can become as meaningful as inclusions. Such variations therefore become interpretatively significant. The Trojan War narrative also occupies a particularly interesting position

between Greek and Roman cultural identities. The Trojan War stands at the centre of Greek literary culture, education and identity, while Trojan ancestry became equally important to Roman constructions of origins, identity, and historical destiny. Roman receptions of Troy therefore participate in a continuing negotiation between Greek cultural inheritance and Roman reinterpretation. Trojan myth consequently provides a valuable vehicle for this thesis – concerned with literary and visual culture in the Roman imperial world. It was broadly familiar, repeatedly reworked across different media, and continually open to new ideological interpretations.

The Trojan War provides a controlled mythological corpus through which broader questions about meaning-making across media can be explored. The three case studies encompass different time periods, literary genres, type of visual media, geographical scope, scale, language, social, cultural, and historical contexts, and conditions of viewing. The chronological scope extends broadly from the first to the third centuries CE. The term "Roman" is similarly used in a broad historical and cultural sense. It does not refer exclusively to Latin-language literature, Italy, or a narrowly defined ethnic Roman identity. Greek Imperial language, literature, and *paideia* remained fundamental components of Roman imperial culture.[20]

The three case studies are organised around Aeneas, Achilles, and Protesilaus, each of whom provides a different point of entry into the relationship between literary interpretation and visuality. Mythological heroes are especially useful intermedial anchors because they are both narratively mobile and visually recognisable; individual versions of their stories can place different emphasis upon the figures, their actions, relationships, and narrative significance. Each chapter consequently focuses upon different ways of applying visuality to text, allowing the thesis to move progressively from questions of organisation, through spectatorship, to the authority attributed to sight and visual experience.

[20] Whitmarsh 2001; Swain 1996; Woolf 1994.

Chapter One examines Aeneas through a comparison between the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*. Both works condense and reorganise extensive Trojan War material, and their conjunction makes particularly visible questions of scale, miniaturisation, spatial organisation, centrality, and circularity. Particular attention is given to the prominence accorded to Aeneas and to the ways in which visual and structural principles retrospectively position Rome within the history of Troy.

Chapter Two moves from the organisation of narrative to the position of the spectator within it. It brings Statius' *Achilleid* into dialogue with Pompeiian wall paintings of Achilles on Skyros, focusing upon the networks of gazes generated around Achilles. The Skyros episode is particularly concerned with looking, concealment, exposure, recognition, and delay, while the visual tradition makes relationships between viewer and viewed especially significant. Applying these dynamics of gaze to Statius' poem reveals how Achilles is repeatedly constituted through the perspectives of those who observe him and how the reader is drawn into this shifting play of gazes. These dynamics also illuminate the poem's generic instability, particularly its negotiation between epic and erotic or elegiac modes. While Chapter One demonstrates that visuality can organise narrative, Chapter Two shows how it can structure interpretation through spectatorship.

Chapter Three develops the implications of visuality further by exploring how authority is attributed to sight. It investigates Philostratus' *Heroicus* alongside the sculptural and iconographic traditions associated with Protesilaus, focusing on visibility, material presence, autopsy, epiphany, and claims to knowledge. Protesilaus' statuary tradition sharpens the text's preoccupation with the material presence of an otherwise absent hero. At the same time, however, the *Heroicus* demonstrates that the authority of sight can be produced through verbal narrative. The final case study, therefore, moves beyond the question of how things are seen and demonstrates that visuality can participate in the construction of authority. All three chapters also share a parallel outward expansion towards the audience. Chapter One considers the scale and physical role played by the viewer, while Chapter Two moves from gazes represented within text and image to the interpretative gaze of the external viewer, and Chapter Three moves from the Vinedresser's construction of visual authority to the reader's capacity to recognise and

question that construction. In all of these cases, the cultural and visual knowledge brought by the audience becomes integral to the production of meaning.

The three case studies are therefore cumulative rather than parallel applications of the same method. Chapter One establishes visuality as a principle of narrative organisation, Chapter Two moves outward to the relationship between viewer and viewed, and Chapter Three develops the consequences of that relationship by asking how sight acquires authority. The same progression is reflected in the heroic case studies themselves: from where Aeneas is positioned and made visible, through how Achilles is seen and constituted through competing gazes, to the implications of Protesilaus being seen at all.

Finally, the variation in literary genre and visual medium tests the broader applicability of the intermedial method. From epic epitome and miniature relief, through Flavian epic and domestic wall painting, to imperial Greek prose and statuary, the case studies demonstrate that visuality cannot be reduced to a single literary technique or to explicit descriptions of artworks. Modes of viewing can participate in the organisation of narrative, the construction of genre and spectatorship, and the production of knowledge and authority. The structure of the thesis thus reflects its broader argument that Roman literary meaning was produced within a cultural environment in which reading and viewing formed overlapping rather than isolated interpretative practices.

CHAPTER ONE: Seeing Aeneas in the *Ilias Latina* and on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*

INTRODUCTION

In the century following the publication of Virgil's *Aeneid* in 19BCE, there was a proliferation of Latin epic published in Rome. A subsection of this sudden rise of texts focussed specifically on the Trojan War. In addition, there existed contemporary visual media exploring the same stories. Literary and visual reiterations of the Trojan War in Rome were not parallel practices, but a cultural phenomenon in which both media interacted consciously and deliberately within the same intermedial cultural landscape.

Discussions of the *Aeneid* and its subsequent literary impact are legion;[1] however, less has been done to look at how Roman cultural identity continues to be negotiated through the use of Troy and the Trojan War, *particularly across media*. Furthermore, scholarship has often neglected to consider the ways in which incorporating visual evidence into their analysis of the literary can provide enriched understandings into this cultural identity, as well as into ancient understandings of literature.[2] Given that literature was often 'read' within a culture of visuality in Rome, one medium should not be removed from the context of the other when examined in modern scholarship.

This chapter argues that the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* should be understood as participating in this shared cultural landscape. Although one is a literary poem and the other a sculpted visual representation, they engage so closely in their treatment of the Trojan War that they are best interpreted in a direct engagement or dialogue, rather than in isolation. Reading them together reveals correspondences that have gone largely unnoticed in scholarship on either work individually, while also challenging pre-existing scholarly assumptions about the nature of each. This chapter demonstrates that these correspondences extend beyond shared subject matter. Both works, irrefutably working in dialogue, transform the vast scale of the *Iliad* through analogous processes of selection, compression, and abstraction, replacing continuous

[1] Putnam 1995; Martindale 1997; Braund and Torlone 2018; Farrell and Putnam 2010; Barnes 1995.
[2] An exception: Smith 2006.

epic narrative with carefully organised sequences of highly charged visual episodes. In doing so, they produce remarkably similar modes of representation in which meaning emerges through the reader/viewer's subjective interpretation of the visual narrative. The striking isomorphy between text and relief suggests that, in early imperial Rome, literature adopts visuality as a means for transmitting meaning. The *Ilias Latina* is a poem whose very form plays with a 'visual' mode of reading/viewing more in line with a tablet. Considering the poem alongside the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* reveals it to be a profoundly visual work, one whose compressed form, organisation of episodes, and recurrent concern with acts of seeing encourage modes of reading that resemble the viewing practices demanded by the tablet. Through analyses of scale and miniaturisation, patterns of viewing, centrality, and circularity, this chapter argues that visuality is not simply one of the poem's themes but a principle of its formal construction.

Such an interpretation also illuminates the ideological program shared by both works. That first-century CE Roman representations of the Trojan War privilege Aeneas and foreground Rome's origins is entirely expected, and the motivations for which the Trojan past is appropriated and reshaped for Roman audiences have long been recognised. What has received less attention, however, is the extent to which this ideological program is realised through visuality itself. Read together, the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* construct a profoundly teleological vision of the Trojan War, in which episodes are selected, arranged, and viewed according to their significance for Rome's future rather than their place within the Homeric narrative. The war is thus configured from its outset as a history oriented towards the foundation of Rome, while Roman identities and values are projected onto Trojan figures at a point chronologically earlier than Virgil's own articulation of this process in the *Aeneid*. Their shared visual logic therefore not only shapes how the Trojan past is encountered but also guides the reader and viewer towards an unmistakably Roman interpretation of that past.

Ultimately, the chapter provides a demonstration of the broader methodological claim advanced throughout this thesis. Bringing text and image into sustained dialogue produces interpretations that neither medium can generate independently, revealing an intermedial literary culture in which Roman readers and viewers encountered Trojan War

narratives through mutually informing textual and visual forms. This chapter builds upon the substantial body of scholarship that has sought to dismantle the modern disciplinary separation of texts and images in the study of the ancient world.[3] In particular, the work of Michael Squire has demonstrated with exceptional force that Roman visual and literary cultures cannot be understood as autonomous spheres, but instead participate in complex and mutually constitutive systems of meaning.[4] Such scholarship has fundamentally reshaped the study of classical art and literature by foregrounding the interpretative possibilities that emerge when visual and verbal media are considered together. This chapter is concerned with pursuing sustained intermedial readings of individual works, or pairings of works, to demonstrate precisely how meaning is generated through their dialogue, and to see the cultural and literary significance of these interactions. This chapter argues that the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (henceforth also referred to as *Il. Lat.* and *Tab. Il. Cap.*, respectively)[5] are best understood as participating in the same intermedial discourse, and that reading them alongside one another fundamentally reshapes the interpretation of each. In doing so, the chapter seeks not simply to illustrate the value of studying texts and images together, but to demonstrate the power of intermedial reading as a critical methodology.

Throughout this chapter, all translations of the *Ilias Latina* are my own.[6]

INTRODUCTION TO THE *ILIAS LATINA*

Though the *Ilias Latina* is now widely unknown and considered obscure, the poem was once a significant text from late antiquity through to the Renaissance. The *Il. Lat.*, which condensed the Homeric *Iliad* from 15,693 lines into 1,070 lines of hexameter verse, was the only Latin translation of the *Iliad* to be transmitted to the medieval world. Because of this, the text became the most important source for the Homeric *Iliad* in Europe. Familiarity with the *Il. Lat.* is indicated from late antiquity in the works of Dracontius, Dictys of Crete, and in Lactantius Placidus' commentary on Statius. In the Carolingian

[3] Elsner 1995, 1996, 2007; Squire 2009, 2011, 2015; Zanker 1998.
[4] Squire 2009, 2011, 2015.
[5] Though 22 separate marble tablets make up the *Tabulae Iliacae*, my focus will be only on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* in this thesis. This is due both to its level of preservation and similarities to the *Ilias Latina*, but also to the restrictions of scope placed on this thesis.
[6] Latin taken from The Latin Library: https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ilias.html.

Age, the *Il. Lat.* was being read as a school text, and it remained part of the school curriculum for centuries following.[7]

As the *Ilias Latina* has fallen into obscurity following the discovery of the *Iliad*, there has been a significant dearth of scholarship concerning the *Il. Lat.*, particularly in Anglophone scholarship. Research on the *Il. Lat.* surged significantly in the decades between the 19th and 20th centuries, with focus predominantly placed on the dating and authorship of the work.[8] Further scholarship has addressed the reconstruction and interpretation of the acrostics framing the poem at its beginning and conclusion,[9] as well as the *constitutio textus*, its relationship with the Homeric original, and attempts at explaining possible reasons for its departures from Homeric tradition.[10] Emil Baehrens' edition of the poem as *Homerus Latinus* in the *Poetae Latini Minores*, for example, considered problems of authorship and dating alongside the state of the textual tradition, while Friedrich Vollmer's *Zum Homerus Latinus* offered an extensive reconstruction of the manuscript tradition and history of transmission together with a substantial critical apparatus. The reconstruction and interpretation of the acrostics at the beginning and end of the poem likewise became central to attempts to establish the identity of its author.

The later twentieth century saw these textual and authorial concerns increasingly supplemented. An important development was Marco Scaffai's 1982 edition, *Baebii Italici Ilias Latina*, which combined a critical text, Italian translation, and extensive commentary with a substantial introduction addressing not only authorship and manuscript transmission, but also the poem's relationship with the *Iliad*, and its language and metre. In the same year, Antonino Grillo's *Critica del testo: Imitazione e narratologia: ricerche sull'Ilias Latina e la tradizione epica classica* brought textual criticism into dialogue with literary and narratological analysis. Grillo examines the poem's repetitions of content and form,[11] its relationship with its Greek model, and its engagement with

[7] Kennedy 1998: 9-13.
[8] Baehrens 1883; Vollmer 1913; Nathansky 1906, 1907; Morelli 1914; Scheda 1965.
[9] Kilpatrick 1992: 858-859.
[10] Baehrens 1883; Vollmer 1913; Scaffai 1982; Grillo 1982; Broccia 1992.
[11] Grillo 1982: 39-64.

earlier Latin epic, particularly Ennius and Virgil.[12] His analysis of individual episodes, including the poem's unevenly matched duels, consequently treats departures from Homer not merely as textual problems but as features of the Latin poet's narrative technique.[13] Giuseppe Broccia's *Prolegomeni all' "Omero latino"* similarly combines attention to problems of textual constitution with consideration of the relationship between the Latin poem and its Homeric model.[14] Collectively, these studies began to shift discussion beyond the establishment of the poem's text and authorship towards the literary consequences of its processes of selection, compression, imitation, and alteration.

Furthermore, a dissertation offering a new reading and early English translation of the text was written by Welcome Tilroe at the University of Southern California in 1939 (*The Ilias Latina: A Study of the Latin Iliad Including Translation, Commentary and Concordance*). However, due to the outbreak of WWII, the work was never catalogued in *L'année philologique*, nor was it digitised until recently. Gérard Fry's French translation and George Kennedy's English *The Latin Iliad* both appeared in 1998; Kennedy's edition made the poem substantially more accessible to English-speaking readers through its introduction, text, translation, and notes, although its commentary remained considerably briefer than Scaffai's and focused principally on comparison with the Homeric *Iliad*. A more pronounced treatment of the *Ilias Latina* as a literary work in its own right is evident in Maria Jennifer Falcone and Christoph Schubert's edited volume *Ilias Latina: Text, Interpretation, and Reception* (2021). The volume substantially broadens the range of approaches brought to the poem, concentrating particularly on its investigation around narrative form, intertextuality, literary and metaliterary strategies, and reception.[15] This trajectory has most recently culminated in Steven J. Green's *Ilias*

[12] Grillo 1982: 65-99.
[13] Grillo 1982: 101-121.
[14] Broccia 1992.
[15] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 10; Focusses within the volume include structure and narrative technique (Aricò, Reitz, and Rohman), the text within the context of ancient epitome (Cè), battles and depictions of death (Horn), selected scenes and their adaption from the *Iliad* (Bierl), eating and drinking (White), Homer as background text (Huber-Rebenich), the text's relationship to Virgil (Falcone) and Ovid (Galasso), the poetic significance of 'sphragis' (Schürmann), the acrostics (Schubert), Roman sexual aggression (Green), the text's 10th century revival (Duplessis; Ferrari) and receptions (Gärtner), the return of Achilles to Greece (Carpinato), and a comprehensive bibliography of the *Ilias Latina* (Galfré).

Latina: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary (2025), the first English translation of the poem to appear with a major mainstream press and the first full commentary in English.[16] Green's treatment consolidates the increasing recognition of the *Il. Lat.* as a sophisticated Roman appropriation of Homer, attentive not only to its Homeric source but to its sustained engagement with the Latin poetic tradition and the literary and cultural environment of the early imperial period. Rather than approaching its departures from Homer primarily as deficiencies or problems requiring explanation, recent scholarship has therefore increasingly made those departures themselves objects of interpretation.

Questions concerning the date and authorship of the *Ilias Latina* have long occupied scholarly discussion. Recent consensus concurs with the belief that developed in the second half of the 19th century that the *Il. Lat.* should be dated to the first century CE and the Neronian period. Scaffai, Falcone and Schubert, and Green have more specifically dated the work to between 60-65CE.[17] Reasons for this have included literary allusions to Ovid and Virgil, who is considered a clear *terminus post quem*. Metrical considerations also suggest a date between Ovid and the Flavian authors. Indeed, striking textual parallels with the tragedies of Seneca point to chronological proximity to his works. More specifically, a reference to the Julio-Claudian dynasty (*Il. Lat.* 899-902) alludes to Augustus' apotheosis and provides 68CE as a *terminus ante quem*. Additionally, the unique treatment of the Shield of Achilles (*Il. Lat.* 876-891) contains imagery of Apollo, the golden age, and harmony of the spheres, as well as keywords like *aequitas, pax*, and *ius* which are characteristic of Neronian panegyric and also occur in the contemporaneous works of Lucan, Calpurnius Siculus, Seneca, and in the *Carmina Einsidlensia*.[18] The poem's style and language show similarities to Virgil and Ovid, though do not display distinct parallels with Lucan or Flavian epic tradition. Rather, its broadly

[16] Green 2025: preface.
[17] Green 2025: 10-11; Falcone and Schubert 2021: 3-5; For a more in-depth exploration into the dating of the *Ilias Latina*, see as well as Lachmann 1841: 161; Müller 1860: 481; Nathansky 1906, 1907: 276-288; Morelli 1914: 126-130; Scheda 1965; Courtney 2001; Schubert 1998: 235.
[18] Fuchs 1967; Scheda 1966, 1969; Grillo 1982, 1992; Scaffai 1997: 20-22; Schubert 1998: 230-237.

pro-Trojan reworking of Homer instead appears to reflect a different poetic agenda, which accords well with the cultural climate of the Neronian period.[19]

Before the acrostics in the proem and epilogue were discovered in 1877, (according to Kennedy it was in 1875 by Oskar Seyfert),[20] attempts to identify a possible author relied primarily on the poem's stylistic and metrical features, together with the analysis of its political position.[21] During the Medieval period, the *Il. Lat.* was often attributed to Homer. Sometimes it has also been attributed to Pindar of Thebes or Dares of Phrygia.[22] After the discovery of the acrostics: ITALICUS SCRIPSIT, a natural conclusion would be that the *Il. Lat.* was likely authored by Silius Italicus, author also of the *Punica* in the first century CE.[23] J. Döring conducted a comparative study (1884, 1886) attempting to draw comparisons between the *Ilias Latina* and the *Punica*,[24] and this hypothesis was renewed in the mid-20th century by L. Herrmann and G.E. Duckworth.[25] However, this theory was ultimately conclusively disproved by Vollmer, who attributed the poem instead to Baebius Italicus.[26] The Baebius Italicus who did indeed exist in the first century CE was a *quaestor* in Cyprus, tribune of the plebs under Vespasian, *propraetor* in Gallia Narbonensis, legate of the 14th legion in Germany, *legatus Augusti propraetore* in Lycia-Pamphilia from 84 to 87CE, and suffect consul of Rome in 90CE. He was likely born in Italy in c.40-50CE, and Scaffai believes that he may have composed the *Il. Lat.* as a student exercise in rhetoric. Kennedy also adopted this theory in his edition.[27] This interpretation, however, should be treated cautiously. Rhetorical influence was certainly not unique to 'school exercises', and the categorisation has often been used to diminish the literary status of particular texts.

[19] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 3-5; Putnam 2018.
[20] Kennedy 1998: 10.
[21] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 4.
[22] Kennedy 1998: 10.
[23] Kennedy 1998: 10.
[24] Green 2025: 15.
[25] Herrmann 1947; Duckworth 1967: 100-109.
[26] Vollmer 1913: 16; Eck 1997; Falcone and Schubert 2021: 5; see also Schenkl 1890: 317-318.
[27] Kennedy 1998: 10; Falcone and Schubert concede that the work is clearly influenced by the rhetorical school, yet do not necessarily believe that the text had to be a direct product of the school as a paraphrasing exercise of a student. In accordance with recent research, they argue that literary claims in the *Ilias Latina* "exceed the expectations connected with a simply Homeric adaption." (2021: 5).

Doubts have been raised concerning Baebius Italicus' designation as author given the rarity of the name. It occurs once in a late manuscript (Vindobonensis 3509) and once in an inscription that attests the man's career during the Flavian age.[28] Kennedy believes it is "extremely odd, perhaps unparalleled in textual history" that such a late manuscript could solely correctly identify an author.[29] However, the name Baebius Italicus was unknown in the fifteenth century, making it unlikely to be conjecture by a scribe. Kennedy suggests that the manuscript Vindobonensis may have derived the name from an earlier manuscript, a point otherwise ignored, as scribes were more attracted by the attribution of "Homer" as author.[30] Subsequent scholarship has questioned both the authority of the Vindobonensis manuscript and the uncertain chronology linking Baebius Italicus' career with the writing of the *Ilias Latina*. Furthermore, the rubricator of the manuscript was Humanist Johannes Cuspinianus. Because of this, Falcone and Schubert argue that the 'Baebius hypothesis' may be more plausibly regarded as a "Humanist invention".[31] Given the lack of certainty, the Italicus theory may be seen as an attempt to definitively attribute the text to an author, albeit a dubious one. Therefore, I will refer to the text as anonymously authored throughout this thesis. Furthermore, differing interpretations of the acrostics remove the pressure to attribute the writing of the work to an Italicus. R. S. Kilpatrick points out that in 1875, the acrostic discovered in the opening of the poem was ITALIC*S.[32] Many *u/v* conjectures have been put forward to remedy the corruption in the manuscript and complete the acrostic as ITALICUS.[33] Kilpatrick suggests that the author may instead have used an archaic form – ITALICOS – for the inscription.[34] More recently, Francesca Middleton has proposed reading ITALICOS not as an archaic nominative singular identifying an author, but as a masculine, accusative plural modifying an implied *uersus*: *Italicos [uersus] Pieris scripsit*, "the Muse wrote Italian [verses]."[35] This reading shifts the acrostic away from authorial identification and towards the explicitly Roman

[28] Scaffai 1982: 15-18, 465-467; Kalinka 1932: 984.
[29] Kennedy 1998: 10.
[30] Kennedy 1998: 10.
[31] Eck 1997; Courtney 1998: 933; Benelli 2017; Falcone and Schubert 2021: 5.
[32] Kilpatrick 1992: 858.
[33] Including: *uersarent ex quo* (Döring), *uolverunt ex quo* (Havet), *ut primum tolerant* (Baehrens), *unde et pertulerant* (Dane): Kilpatrick 1992: 858-859.
[34] *Obtulerant/optulerant:* Kilpatrick 1992: 859; Green 2025 12-4 cites more acrostic options in the vocative and notes that theses have mostly been discredited.
[35] Middleton 2020: 96-97.

character of the poem itself. At any rate, ITALICUS can equally be understood as a statement declaring the 'Latin/Italian' quality or slant of the work. In other words, 'Italicus' is used to signpost that this was written by an Italian for Italians.[36] Given the seeming purpose of this poem, which will be discussed throughout this chapter, this general intention seems most likely.

The poem has not found favour among modern philologists. Scholars have often zeroed in on the text's "numerous departures from the Homeric original", namely its uneven coverage of each book of the *Iliad*. E. R. Curtius described the text as "a wretched piece of work",[37] P. K. Marshall as an "unattractive compendium",[38] and Scaffai a work "*con vistose disuguaglianze*."[39] Kennedy describes the *Ilias Latina*, which condenses the *Iliad* into 1,070 lines of hexameter verse, as a schoolboy exercise in rhetoric,[40] again demonstrating the scholarly tendency to reduce works to the schoolroom, rather than engage with their more puzzling content critically. Though a school context need not indicate that the text is insignificant or uninteresting – the classroom interaction could be a dynamic and creative one – this 'schoolroom' view has been common and remains reductionist in nature.

As we shall see below regarding the *Tabulae Iliacae*, inconsistencies between texts certainly do not suggest unfamiliarity with the text, or an uneducated author. Rather, the act of translating the poem from Greek into Latin and epitomising the text so dramatically suggests that the author had more sophisticated objectives in mind than simplified recounting. Scholars have often fallen into the trap of attributing modern understandings of the art of translating to the ancient practice. While official translations of documents sought to be literal and verbatim, literary translations were often imitations and adaptions of the original,[41] tailored for a different audience with differing practices and cultural interests. Roman translators often intended to use a source text as a model from

[36] Green 2025: 16 notes that previous authors have signalled this intent similarly by *latinus/e*.
[37] Curtius 1963 (trans. Willard R. Trask): 51.
[38] Marshall 1983: 191.
[39] Scaffai 1982: 57.
[40] Kennedy 1998: 9.
[41] Kennedy 1998: 11.

which to produce something new and relevant for his own reader.[42] This process of reworking the original text while translating allowed for the author to include or erase sections to make it relevant to his own contemporaneous culture.[43] Examples of this practice include Livius Andronicus' translation of the *Odyssey*, a metaphrase version in some locations, condensed in others. The early first century BCE translation of the *Iliad* by Gnaeus Matius, now mostly lost, is another example. Latin translations of the astronomical poem of Aratus by Cicero, Germanicus and Avienus contain omissions, corrections, and additions also.[44]

The author of the *Ilias Latina* clearly worked with a similar understanding of the art of translation. His Latin version of the *Iliad* rearranges narrative order, makes the content more relatable to a Roman audience, increases the *pathos* of certain events, and sometimes makes deviations and potential errors. Most importantly was the significant series of omissions made by the author to cut the *Iliad* down from 15,693 to 1,070 lines.[45] The poem's content and structure will be discussed in the following sections; however, the homage to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and the acrostics in the open and close of the poem, are but brief examples of the complex ways in which the author was operating with the text. As with the *Tabulae Iliacae,* I argue that there was erudite enjoyment to be had in recognising the points of correspondence and divergence between the Homeric original and the Latin reworking.

Green notes that the high style of the epilogue and the divine addressees of the poem make clear that it was most likely intended as a work of "a high order and for a suitably sophisticated audience."[46] Falcone and Schubert believe that the text had been written for the Roman public as a way to interpret their place in the context of the *Aeneid* and the great Homeric epic.[47] The text functioned as a sophisticated, ambitious, and contemporary response to both the Homeric *Iliad* and Virgil's recently published

[42] Green 2025: 3-4; Possanza 2004: 29.
[43] Green 2025: 4; Possanza 2004: 27.
[44] Kennedy 1998: 11.
[45] Kennedy 1998: 11.
[46] Green 2025: 17.
[47] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 2.

Aeneid.[48] While the author does not create a great amount of new content, he does reframe the Trojan War narrative in an attempt to contextualise the place of contemporary Rome within a greater historical setting. The *Il. Lat.* challenged direct translation of the *Iliad* by providing a new Roman interpretation of the myth, which engages also with the previous Latin tradition of translating.[49] The text also has evident panegyrical aims. The blending of the original Greek material with new Roman literature and political ideologies celebrate the Julio-Claudian *gens* and presents as a product of Neronian literature.[50] The *Il. Lat.* is not a work of the highest literary genius. Battle scenes are described with a limited and repetitive vocabulary, and they follow a formulaic structure throughout the text. However, the work exceeds the expectations connected with a simple translation or adaptation. It seems likely that the perceived lack of literary 'flair' within the *Il. Lat.,* as well as its reduced scale, which makes it seem pale when compared with the *Iliad,* has contributed to its being continually overlooked by scholars.

INTRODUCTION TO THE *TABULA ILIACA CAPITOLINA*

The *Tabulae Iliacae* as a whole constitute 22 marble tablets which depict various historical and mythological scenes with both visual and verbal summaries. Of the 22 tablets, 17 were discovered in Rome or in areas directly outside the city. Tablets 1A (also referred to here as *Tab. Il. Cap*.), 7Ti, and 17M suggest findspots more specifically in Roman aristocratic villas.[51] The *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (Figure 1) was recorded by Rafaello Fabretti as having been discovered at the same site as the Archelaus relief, and a trophaic monument with a portrait of Claudius, in Bovillae.[52] Tablet 17M was found amidst a wealth of other cultural symbols, including Imperial busts, a seated statue group of the Three Muses and a poet, and possibly even a portrait of Homer.[53]

[48] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 5.
[49] Polymerakis 2004, 2005; Putnam 2018; Falcone and Schubert 2021: 6.
[50] Falcone and Schubert 2021: 6;
[51] Squire 2011: 65-66.
[52] Fabretti 1683: 316, 383; Reifferscheid 1862: 105; Squire 2011: 66.
[53] Squire 2011: 67.

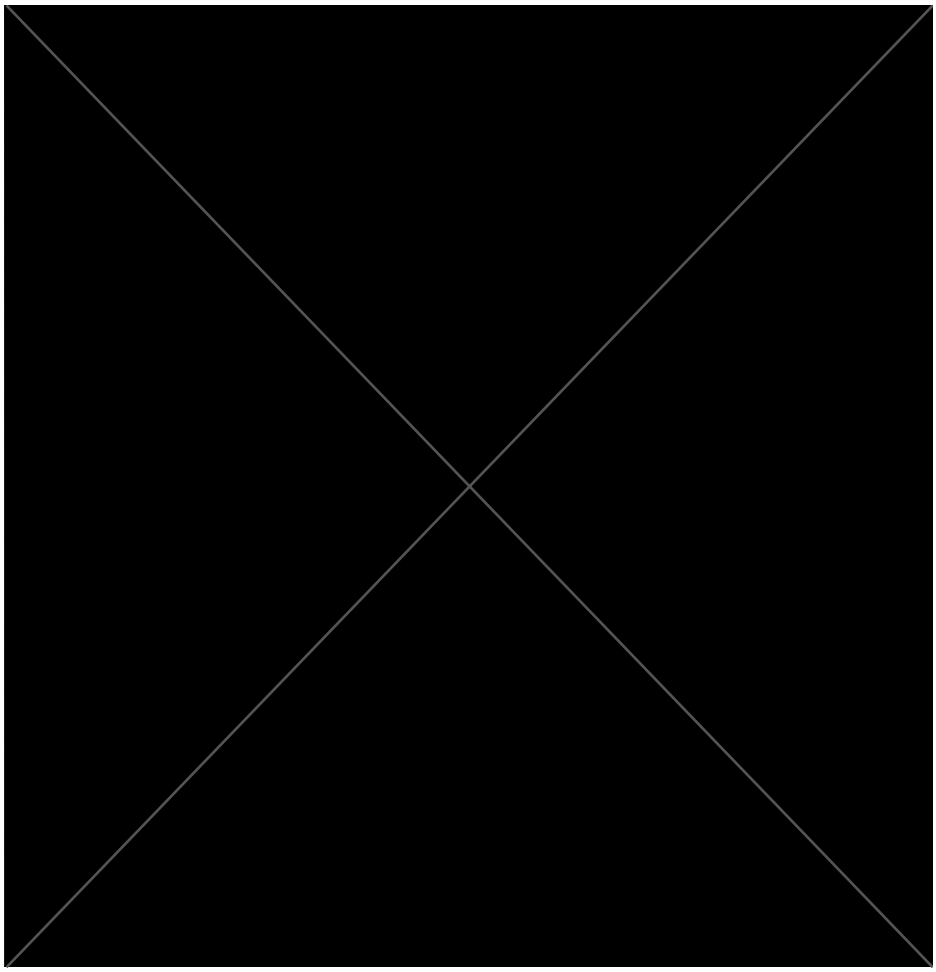

Figure 1: *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (Tablet 1A), c. 1st century CE. Capitoline Museums, Palazzo Nuovo, Sala delle Colombe, inv. MC 316. Photograph by author.

Almost all of the tablets are able to be dated to the late 1st century BCE or early first century CE. Two factors make this dating confident: many of the tablets display clear Augustan colouring in their depictions of the Trojan War.[54] This is particularly clear on the *Tab. Il. Cap.*, on which the departure of Aeneas from Troy is one of the most significant elements of the tablet. Secondly, the reverse inscriptions of *tabulae* 18L and 22Get both narrate their histories from the perspective of 15/16CE.[55] These features, then, indicate an early Imperial date for the majority of the tablets.[56] More specifically, the iconography on the *Tab. Il. Cap*. appears to derive from a sculptural group set up in Rome's forum of Augustus. Although begun in 17BCE, this project was only finished in 5BCE – a date which has sometimes been thought to provide an approximate *terminus post quem* for the *Tab.*

[54] Squire 2011: 59.
[55] Squire 2011: 60.
[56] Squire 2011: 58.

Il. Cap.[57] The *Tab. Il. Cap*., however, can be more precisely dated. Scholars have linked the iconography of the central image of Aeneas escaping Troy with Anchises and Ascanius to the statue group that was situated in the Augustan Forum. This statue group has been dated to c. 5BCE, also making this date a likely *terminus post quem* for the *Tab. Il. Cap.*[58] Anna Sadurska proves that a number of different workshops produced the tablets and attributes them to four separate artistic groups.[59] The *Tab. Il. Cap* is then attributed to a "Theodorus" or his workshop.[60]

Thirteen of the tablets engage with the *Iliad*, while nine feature Trojan narratives more generally. These include tablets 1A, 2NY, 3C, 6B, 7Ti, 8E, 9D, 20Par, and 21Fro.[61] None of the tablets survive completely extant, with the most complete fragment being the *Tab. Il. Cap*. The surviving fragment measures 25x30 cm; this is the original height, although the original length was just over 40 cm. Within the proportions of the surviving portion, over 250 figures are contained.[62] The tablet presents an overview of a variety of epic texts – Stesichorus' *Ilioupersis*, Arctinus of Miletus' *Aethiopis*, Lesches of Pyrrhaea's *Little Iliad*, the Homeric *Iliad*,[63] and also potentially the *Ilias Latina*.

Like the *Il. Lat.*, the tablets had been little known among both philologists and art historians prior to Squire's treatment of them in 2011.[64] As the *Il. Lat*. remains overlooked in modern scholarship, so the *Tabulae Iliacae* also continue to be bypassed. They have been excluded from many catalogues of Hellenistic and Roman art.[65] Furthermore, these

[57] Squire 2011: 59; Petrain 2014: 7, 100, 129.
[58] "In the centre of the complex's northern exedra, facing a statue of Romulus directly opposite, stood Augustan Rome's founding hero, with Anchises and Ascanius again in tow; the group was surrounded on either side by Aeneas' latter-day descendants – the first Trojan kings in Latium, the Julian heirs, and last but not least Julius Caesar": Squire 2011: 149.
[59] Sadurska 1964: 10-15.
[60] Theodorus explicitly signed the tablet with his name, along with tablets 2NY, 3C, 4N, and 5O: Sadurska 2964: 16-17; for comprehensive discussion concerning the identity of Theodorus, workshops, and ancient artistic signatures, see Squire 2011: 283-302.
[61] Petrain 2014: 78-88.
[62] Squire 2011: 11-12.
[63] Squire 2011: 14.
[64] Squire 2011: 3.
[65] Webster 1967; Robertson 1975; Onians 1979; Fowler 1989; Smith 1991; Bejor, Castoldi, and Lambrugo 2008; Picard 1962; Hanfmann 1966; Bianchi-Bandinelli 1970; Andreae 1973; Baratte 1996; Stewart 2004; Kleiner 2007; Zanker 2007; and Ramage and Ramage 2009. Some introductory discussions of the tablets include Brilliant 1984: 53-59; Pollitt 1986: 202-204; Schefold and Jung 1989: 177-181; Ridgway 1990: 264-266; Anderson 1997: 1-5; Small 2003: 93-96; and Burn 2004: 133-135.

brief attempts to analyse the tablets contain what Squire has described as "crippling errors of fact and interpretation."[66] The work of Raffaele Fabretti in 1683 on the *Tab. Il. Cap*. became the first full-length discussion of any of the *Tabulae Iliacae*, following its discovery by Arcangelo Spagna. In 1873, the first work on the *Tabulae Iliacae* as a collection (of twelve tablets) was published by Otto Jahn and Adolf Michaelis.[67] Sadurska analysed a further seven tablets in her 1964 catalogue. In 1979 came a landmark article by Nicholas Horsfall,[68] which monumentally influenced discussions concerning the *Tabulae Iliacae*. Nina Valenzuela Montenegro's 2004 work has been described by Squire as "by far the most exhaustive taxonomy of the tablets."[69] Finally in 2011, Squire's publication of *The Iliad in a Nutshell: Visualising Epic on the Tabulae Iliacae* provided both a comprehensive survey and analysis of the 22 currently identified tablets. It is to this work that my introductory groundwork discussions of the *Tab. Il. Cap*. is heavily indebted.

Prior to 2011, scholarship was concerned with a narrow range of issues pertaining to the tablets. Most importantly, scholarship has dwelled heavily on the original purpose, function, and display context of the set of tablets. Following from this has come the question of how the tablets illustrate texts, and the ways in which they reflect a now lost tradition of Roman manuscript illustration. Scholars have also focussed closely on the seeming attempt to visually reconstruct Stesichorus' lost sixth-century *Ilioupersis,* mostly due to the representation on the *Tab. Il. Cap*. Scholarship has also considered the tablets as mythographic epitomes, such as those of Diodorus Siculus and Apollodorus.[70] Squire himself addresses these questions, whilst also offering the first survey of the tablets in English and focussing predominantly on the games played by the tablets.[71] My focus on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* is different. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scholars became interested in the relationship between the tablets and various Latin literary works.[72] I intend to contribute to this strand of scholarship, and more specifically,

[66] Squire 2011: 18.
[67] Petrain 2014: 9; Squire 2011: 15.
[68] Petrain 2014: 11.
[69] Squire 2011: 15.
[70] Squire 2011: 19.
[71] Squire 2011: 18-19: specifically, "the grand dialectics of the big and the small, the epic and the epigrammatic, the visual and the verbal, and the original and the copy."
[72] Brüning 1894: 136-165.

analyse the direct relationship between the *Tab. Il. Cap*. and the *Il. Lat.*, and how it highlights the prominence of visuality in the literary text, as well as the parallelism by which text and image 'Romanise' myth.

The function of the tablets has remained unclear, and discussions surrounding this issue have tended to dominate scholarship. Establishing the possible function and display context of the tablets is important here because these factors necessarily condition the ways in which they were encountered, viewed, and read. Before considering their relationship with literary texts, it is therefore necessary to outline the principal contexts in which such intermedial engagement may have taken place. Scholars have generally proposed three potential purposes of the tablets: didactic, dedicatory, or decorative.[73]

Didactic

Traditionally, a didactic function has been put forward as the most likely of the three.[74] This suggestion was initially based on the *Tab. Il. Cap*, due to its synopsis of so many different texts, in addition to its small size. Scholars have reasoned that they must have been a child's toy, or perhaps an award given at school to reward academic diligence. However, these tablets seem to be an extremely valuable, and perhaps excessive, prize in such a context. Others have argued that they must have been too heavy for children to carry around, resulting in the argument that instead they must have hung on the walls of classrooms, serving as educational aids.[75] Indeed, Andrew Stewart referred to the tablets as little more than "deluxe crib sheets", designed as a memory aid for owners who were unfamiliar with their Homer: "probably the Roman equivalent of students' flash cards."[76] Squire has disagreed with this well-established argument, citing that it overlooks the physical properties of the tablets (the original weight of the *Tab. Il. Cap.* was likely to have been c. 2kg),[77] as well as conflicts between a potential school syllabus and the content of the tablets as a collective. Furthermore, he asserts that this view is premised on an

[73] Squire 2011: 70; Petrain 2014: 166; Sadurska 1964:18-19; Horsfall 1979a: 31-35; Rouveret 1988: 166-167 n.3 and 1989: 358-359; Salimbene 2002: 6-9; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 402-407, 417-418; Puppo 2009: 833-835.
[74] Squire 2011: 70.
[75] Bethe 1945: 77; Pinney 1924: 240-241; Stewart 1993: 56-62.
[76] Stewart 1996: 51
[77] Squire 2011: 70.

understanding of Victorian systems of education, as opposed to ancient ones.[78] Horsfall rejects this function for a separate set of reasons: the tablets were too fragile, their script too small, they contained errors of spelling and widespread use of Koine forms, or because teachers would have rejected the "trite and often inaccurate summaries."[79]

An alternative, yet related reductionist interpretation of the tablets' function is that of Horsfall – that they served as "vehicles for elementary education."[80] Horsfall argues that the pairing of text and illustration alike, along with the quality of these, suggests an adult owner unfamiliar with Homer. He reasons that even for some of the most familiar scenes in Greek mythology, users frequently required explanatory text. That the summaries on the tablets are restricted to the "barest sequence of characters and events", lest the viewer "strain their attention!", suggests a poorly educated and unsophisticated viewer. The tablets, therefore, allow their owners to peruse the illustrations and simple linguistic demands of the tablet at a generally low cultural level.[81] Horsfall also takes issue with the fact that scenes on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* contain only labelled figures, rather than summaries. Where summaries do occur, "they do not suffice to explain the scenes illustrating those books."[82] On the *Tab. Il. Cap.*, Books 13, 14, and 15 are summarised with the words: "τῆ<ι>ς δ'ὁμαλῆς γιγνομένης", and 17 with: "[μά]χη[ς δ]ὲ περὶ τ[οῦ] νεκ[ρ]οῦ [γενομέ]νης." In 17, moreover, the names identifying the characters are missing.[83]

Horsfall asserts, therefore, that due to the lack of sufficient summaries, we can ascertain the minimal standards set by the workshop; the tablets, subsequently, were aimed very low.[84] Horsfall dismisses the possibility that the workshop's clientele could have known the poems well enough that it did not need summaries, as this was "highly unlikely at this date."[85] Due to these flaws, Horsfall deduces that no educated owner could have derived joy from possession of any of the tablets: "the serious lover of Greek literature would

[78] Squire 2011: 71.
[79] Horsfall 1979a: 32
[80] Horsfall 1979a: 33-35.
[81] Horsfall 1979a: 34.
[82] Horsfall 1979a: 34.
[83] Horsfall 1979a: 34
[84] Horsfall 1979a: 34.
[85] Horsfall 1979a: 34.

surely have been appalled by such a combination of the obvious, the trivial, and the false."[86] As Horsfall says, "there were others."[87]

He suggests an owner such as Calvisius Sabinus, a wealthy freedman and contemporary of Seneca the Younger, who could not remember the names of Achilles, Priam, or Ulysses (*Huic memoria tam mala erat, ut illi nomen modo Vlixis excideret, modo Achillis, modo Priami*: Sen. *Epist*. 27.5). Seneca describes Sabinus as a man with both the bank account and brains of a freedman (*Epist*. 27.5), who so desired to appear learned that he paid for slaves to memorise his poetry for him – one for Homer, one for Hesiod, and another for the nine lyric poets (*Epist*. 27.6). Moreover, Horsfall's perfect owner of the *Tabulae Iliacae* was Petronius' Trimalchio: *et ne me putes studia fastiditum, II bybliothecas habeo, unam Graecam, alteram Latinam* (Pet. *Sat*. 48.4). Trimalchio fills his walls with Homeric pictures, listens to *Homeristae*, drinks from cups depicting Homeric scenes, and yet, the subject matter defeats him.[88] Therefore, according to Horsfall, nobody is more in need of a "mythological prompt-sheet" than Trimalchio.[89] Horsfall posits that, in this world of the nouveau riche, where "this expensive rubbish belonged",[90] "ignorance is to be hidden and memories have to be jolted at every step."[91] It is, therefore, "not hard to imagine the eager delight with which a Trimalchio presented the tablets to his dinner guests."[92]

Given that Horsfall is among a very small number of anglophone scholars to have studied the tablets, his interpretation has remained influential in this sphere. Richard Brilliant cited Horsfall in his conclusion, summarising that the tablets were aimed at "a vulgar clientele that cared little for learning but appreciated the visible trappings of some familiarity with the 'classics'".[93] Similarly, Wallace McLeod condemned the tablets as "a pretence of literacy for the unlettered", and: "tawdry gewgaws intended to provide the illusion of sophistication for those who had none."[94] McLeod also agrees that these

[86] Horsfall 1994: 79.
[87] Horsfall 1979a: 35.
[88] Horsfall 1979a: 35.
[89] Horsfall 1979a: 35.
[90] Horsfall 1979a: 35; 2008: 588-589.
[91] Horsfall 1979a: 35.
[92] Horsfall 1979a: 35.
[93] Brilliant 1984: 57.
[94] McLeod 1985: 165, 164; Squire 2011: 91.

tablets were meant specifically for the nouveau riche, stating that the tablets were "a piece of marketplace trumpery designed to massage the ego and lighten the pocketbook of the newly rich."[95]

Both of these hypothesised functions are debunked immediately by the *Tab. Il. Cap.* itself. The epigram on the tablet is as follows:

> τέχνην τὴν Θεοδώρηον **μάθε τάξιν** Ὁμήρου ὄφρα **δαεὶς πάσης** μετρον ἔχῃς **σοφίας**.
> **Understand** the Theodorean techne, so that, **knowing the order** of Homer, you may have the measure of **every wisdom**.[96]

Horsfall argues that the lack of summaries suggests an uneducated clientele, as most who interacted with Greek mythology regularly required explanatory text. To me, this epigram clearly suggests an opposite interpretation. Particularly significant is δαείς, the aorist participle of δάω ("to learn"),[97] which here carries the sense of "having learned" or "having mastered." The formulation therefore imagines a viewer who has already acquired knowledge of the τάξις Ὁμήρου, rather than one encountering Homeric material for the first time. Within this short inscription, it is made clear that the order of Homer must already be known, and will allow the viewer to understand the tablet, and therefore, have the measure of every wisdom. The πάσης σοφίας is also alluded to on the tablet itself, which visually presents multiple parts and receptions of the Epic Cycle, including the *Iliad, Ilioupersis, Aethiopis, Little Iliad*, and *Ilias Latina*. Horsfall's understanding does not take into account that the viewer may have been educated. So educated, in fact, that summaries were rendered unnecessary, and the game was to interact with all of the texts depicted on the tablet in a demanding, erudite, and playful manner.

Dedicatory

Two sets of evidence have been used to argue for a votive function of the *Tabulae Iliacae*.[98] First, the archaeological findspots of *tabulae* 1A and 7Ti. Tablet 7Ti is said to have come from a temple dedicated to Heracles at Tivoli, and it has been assumed that 1A was

[95] McLeod 1985: 135.
[96] Squire 2010: 72.
[97] LSJ, s.v. δάω.
[98] De Longperier 1845: 440; Veyne 1967: 643; Schefold 1954: 214 and 1975: 40; Squire 2011: 72.

situated in a *sacrarium* to the Julian family at Bovillae. More recent evidence proves that while a *sacrarium* to the Julian family was indeed located at Bovillae, the tablet came from a private villa that lay to the north-east of the town (Tac. *Ann*. 2.41, 15.23).[99] Likewise, 7Ti most probably came from a villa near the Tivoli temple, rather from the temple precinct itself. [100]

Secondly, an inscription on tablet 4N suggests that it was dedicated from "a priestess to the priest" (ἱέρεια ἱερεῖ).[101] Both Squire and Horsfall claim that this palindromic inscription cannot be taken at its word.[102] As I will go on to argue that the intended 'joy' and purpose of these tablets were sophisticated games for the elite upper class, I too agree that the tablet may not set out to do what it states so simply. Furthermore, given the somewhat paltry amount of evidence used to suggest a dedicatory function, a different intended purpose for these tablets seems most likely.

Decorative

Petrain is unable to rule out a didactic, decorative, or display function for the tablets, and so he settles on all three, explaining that isolating a single function of the tablets is an impoverished way of thinking about them.[103] Thus, he spends a chapter dedicated to the argument that the tablets must have been housed in private libraries, serving a multi-purpose display function, predominantly meant to be admired for their workmanship, inspire conversation, and advertise the cultural attainments of their owners.[104] Failing that, and unable to settle on a specific mode of display, Petrain proposes that the tablets were simply intended to rest on a table,[105] somewhat like a modern-day magazine on a coffee table. According to Petrain, a number of the tablets (1A, 2NY, 3C, 8E) had edges that were thinner than the main body of the tablet that had been left unadorned. Therefore, these edges may have been designed specifically for handling the tablets.[106]

[99] Squire 2011: 72; Horsfall 1979a: 32; Petrain 2014: 142.
[100] Squire 2011: 72.
[101] Squire 2011: 72.
[102] Horsfall 1979a: 32-33; Squire 2011: 72.
[103] Petrain 2014: 168-169.
[104] Petrain 2014: 137-169; Reifferscheid 1862: 112-115; Sadurska 1964: 32; Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 405-407; Petrain 2006: 148-188; Jahn 1873: 79-86.
[105] Petrain 2014: 171-172.
[106] Petrain 2014: 172.

To me, simply ascribing a 'Decorative Plus' function to the tablets does not do justice to the complexity of the text and images presented by them. Squire uses the rich, aristocratic villa – the site where the *Tab. Il. Cap*. was found – as the most suitable framework against which to understand the *Tabulae Iliacae* as a whole. Thus, the tablets functioned as "domestic party-pieces, designed to stimulate erudite conversation."[107]

The villa, which epitomised the idea of *otium*, was a place both of scholarly retreat and a forum for all manner of social engagements and was the best site for "cashing in on accumulated cultural capital."[108] This is corroborated by an earlier work of Paul Zanker, which argues that the overly-competitive climate of the Early Imperial period meant that cultural pretensions became one of the primary vehicles for winning distinction.[109] Related finds in villas around Rome, including an imperial bust of Homer and a portrait of Menander with inscribed epigrams from the Villa Aeliana, or the Archelaus relief discovered alongside the *Tab. Il. Cap.*,[110] emphasise the belief that villas were a place to flaunt learning for social effect. To Squire's mind, the *Tabulae Iliacae* epitomise this thinking.[111] Due to their size, compositional arrangements, and media, the tablets serve as emblems for this acquired cultural capital.

Highbrow literary themes were among the favourite sculptural subjects to adorn Roman villas.[112] Pompeii is an example of this – through the less expensive media that was wall painting (Vitruv. 7.5.2).[113] A number of scholars have already shown that mythological paintings (as well as mosaics) in the villas of Pompeii served as prompts for erudite conversation.[114] Instead, Squire's suggestion is more specific: "Learned discussion of myth, history, and literature were the bread and butter of the Roman *cena*. Though he

[107] Squire 2011: 73.
[108] Squire 2011: 74; see also: Mielsch 1987, 1989: 448; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 196-208; Hales 2003: 32-36; Mattusch 2008; Marzano 2007; Lafon 2001.
[109] Zanker 1995: 206.
[110] Squire 2011: 74-75.
[111] Squire 2011: 75.
[112] Neudecker 1988: 764-774, 1998; Bartman 1994; Newby 2002; Tanner 2006: 274-275; Squire 2011: 76.
[113] Throughout the course of his book, Squire links the *Tabulae Iliacae* to both Pompeiian wall paintings and to Statius' *Achilleid* (Squire 2011: 94). In my next chapter, I plan to explicitly address both of these sources in direct analysis.
[114] Squire 2011:77; Bergmann 1999; Ling 1995: 247-248; Hodske 2007; Stefanou 2006: 51-176.

might get his own wonderfully wrong, even Petronius' Trimalchio appreciates that 'one must know one's philology at dinner' (*Sat*. 39.3)."[115] He uses the epic statue groups set up in the Imperial grotto at Sperlonga as corroboration for learned mythical conversation that may have taken place over the course of dinner.[116] Beyond functioning as centrepieces at *cena*, Squire proposes that the tablets functioned similarly to modern handheld game consoles – they could be examined in one's lap, "played" individually, or with friends.[117]

The *Tab. Il. Cap.* demands a viewer who was acquainted with the subjects depicted, as well as with the broader fields of Greek and Latin literature. The pilaster on the right-hand side of the tablet contains very brief summaries, or as in the case of Books 13-15 they are almost omitted altogether. Rather than this being an indication for shoddy craftsmanship and an uneducated owner, this implies that a different reading was required of the viewer. Squire concurs with Valenzuela Montenegro, who concluded that: "for anyone who does not know these texts, both images and the inscriptions remain silent."[118] Squire also highlights the highbrow epigraphic references found in the inscriptions of tablets 1A, 6B, 8E, 10K, 12F, 14G, 17M, and 19J as evidence for the undeniable intellectual aspirations of the collective *Tabulae Iliacae*.[119]

On the whole, I agree most closely with Squire's interpretation. *Contra* Horsfall, I see the lack of detailed explanation on the tablets as evidence that these were highbrow, erudite items, intended for both a well-educated and wealthy owner and his dinner guests, who were well acquainted with their Homer. The inclusion of so many potentially obscure texts, along with the level of intricate detail on the tablets, along with *Tab. Il. Cap.'s* archaeological provenance suggest that this is likely.

As Squire likened the tablets to modern handheld game consoles, such as a Nintendo DSi or PSP, I would, however, draw comparison to a different modern-day item: the

[115] Squire 2011: 77.
[116] Squire 2011: 79.
[117] Squire 2011: 80.
[118] Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 409; Squire 2011: 103.
[119] Squire 2011: 102.

Fabergé egg. Created predominantly between 1885-1917 by the jewellery firm, House of Fabergé, in Saint Petersburg, as many as 69 eggs circulated as symbols of opulence and as highly sought after collector's items.[120] They were created with linked designs and themes, and created a network owned by the most elite upper-class. No doubt, much joy was derived in comparisons between eggs owned by friends or rivals. That we have so many surviving *Tabulae Iliacae* certainly points to a similar cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, the findspot suggests that they may have been something of a collector's item. The tablets' linked conceptual imagery, their production in the Theodorean workshop, and their location in villas suggests to me that these pieces functioned as high-demand and expensive collector's items. They could fulfil a decorative function yet also be brought out at dinner so that the host might impress their guests with both their advanced knowledge and possession of so valuable an item. The tablets thus function both as decorative items as well as extravagant and elaborate domestic display items, designed to impress and stimulate learned discussions.

Overall, it seems plausible to argue that, though both the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* have been assigned to the classroom, both contained more ambitious intentions than to simply rehash their grand, epic subject. Therefore, both expected prior and intimate familiarity with the Homeric *Iliad* and related Greek texts. Finally, both were innovative creations in their own verbal and visual right, reinterpreting the Trojan War in a Roman context in response to Virgil's *Aeneid*.

In the same way that scholars have failed to understand the nuances of the ancient practice of translation, so they have fallen into the trap of misunderstanding the relationship between varying forms of media. Modern analyses of the *Tabulae Iliacae* have been hindered by a series of pre-existing assumptions concerning the relationship between text and image in antiquity. In particular, the assumption that the tablets set out merely to illustrate their various texts has dominated modern scholarship. As a result, scholars, in particular Nicholas Horsfall, have focussed on criticising the tablets'

[120] In 2025, The Faberge Winter Egg was auctioned by Christie's for USD$30.2 million.

"infidelities", "imprecisions", and "outright blunders".[121] In assuming that images could only function in support of literature, Horsfall concludes that the tablets were "expensive rubbish",[122] that "do not provide a particularly careful or accurate text",[123] as well as "faulty and jejune explanatory texts", which were "characteristic of the Vulgarerzahlung of ancient myth."[124] More specifically, Horsfall asserts that study of the *Tab. Il. Cap.* shows "just how unreliable both inscriptions and pictures can be."[125] According to Squire, "Such proverbial small-mindedness has led countless scholars to lose sight of the bigger picture."[126]

If the *Tabulae Iliacae* are approached not as flawed illustrations of prior literary texts but as works that actively reshape their source material through visual form, their apparent departures from text become potentially meaningful rather than erroneous. The same principle can be applied to the *Ilias Latina*: its compression of Homeric epic should not be understood simply in terms of loss, but as a formal strategy capable of reshaping the significance of its source material. The following section therefore returns the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* and the *Ilias Latina* to direct comparison by considering a feature fundamental to both works: miniaturisation and scale. Although one reduces epic spatially and visually and the other verbally and narratively, both manipulate scale in ways that condition how the Trojan War is encountered, organised, and interpreted.

[121] Squire 2011: 127.
[122] Horsfall 1994: 80.
[123] Horsfall 1979a: 33.
[124] Horsfall 1979a: 33.
[125] Horsfall 1979a: 33.
[126] Squire 2011: 15.

MINIATURISATION AND SCALE

"The cleverer I am at miniaturising the world, the better I possess it."[127]

Due to its relatively intact nature, the *Tab. Il. Cap.* is by far the most famous of the *tabulae*. The surviving fragment, now measuring 25x30cm, is housed in the Capitoline Museums in Rome. The tablet is composed of several separate sections (Figure 2 below).[128] In the centre of the tablet is a representation of Stesichorus' *Ilioupersis* (more on this scene in following sections). Within the centre of the *Ilioupersis* scene we see the sack of Troy. We are shown the city and its walls, as well as the area immediately outside it. In the lower half of this scene the individual figures are labelled by inscriptions: the tomb of Hector and the sacrifice of Polyxena are amongst them. Below these, we see a line of Greek ships, and opposite them we see the departure of Aeneas from Troy. We are shown the city from a bird's-eye view, with the figures themselves depicted frontally, and at eye-level. This mixing of perspective was characteristic of Roman art.[129] Also in the *Ilioupersis* scene, just below the centre of the tablet is an adjective – ΤΡΩΙΚΟΣ – written in markedly larger letters. Beneath this are two significantly smaller sections, dedicated to Arctinus of Miletus' *Aethiopis* (above), and Lesches of Pyrrhaea's *Little Iliad* (below).[130] The central scenes are divided on either side by two monumental columns or pilasters. The left column once depicted the first 6 books of the *Iliad*, while the right column depicts Books 7-24 (in 108 lines of Greek). On each side of both columns are a series of 12 pictorial friezes, depicting the 24 books of the *Iliad*. These friezes run vertically, running from the top left-hand corner down to the left-hand bottom corner (Books 1-12), then from the bottom right-hand corner up to the top (Books 13-24). Above the central scenes is an additional horizontal frieze – elongating the narrative of *Iliad* Book 1. The left-hand side of the tablet, including the twelve friezes and the left column have now been lost.

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[127] Bachelard 1964: 150.

[128] The above picture has been taken from Schreiber 1895: 176-179. However, I have added the highlighted sections in order to clearly demonstrate the various structural elements of the tablet.

[129] Petrain 2014: 4.

[130] Like Stesichorus' *Ilioupersis*, we have only fragmentary information about the *Aethiopis* and *Little Iliad*. They seem to have been based off Proclus' 5th century CE summaries and described events that took place between the end of the *Iliad* and the completion of the sack of Troy. These scenes are placed underneath the departure of Aeneas, and Squire notes that they suggest as cyclical nature of the tablet, as they lead us back to the sack of Troy after we encounter Aeneas' departure: Squire 2011: 173.

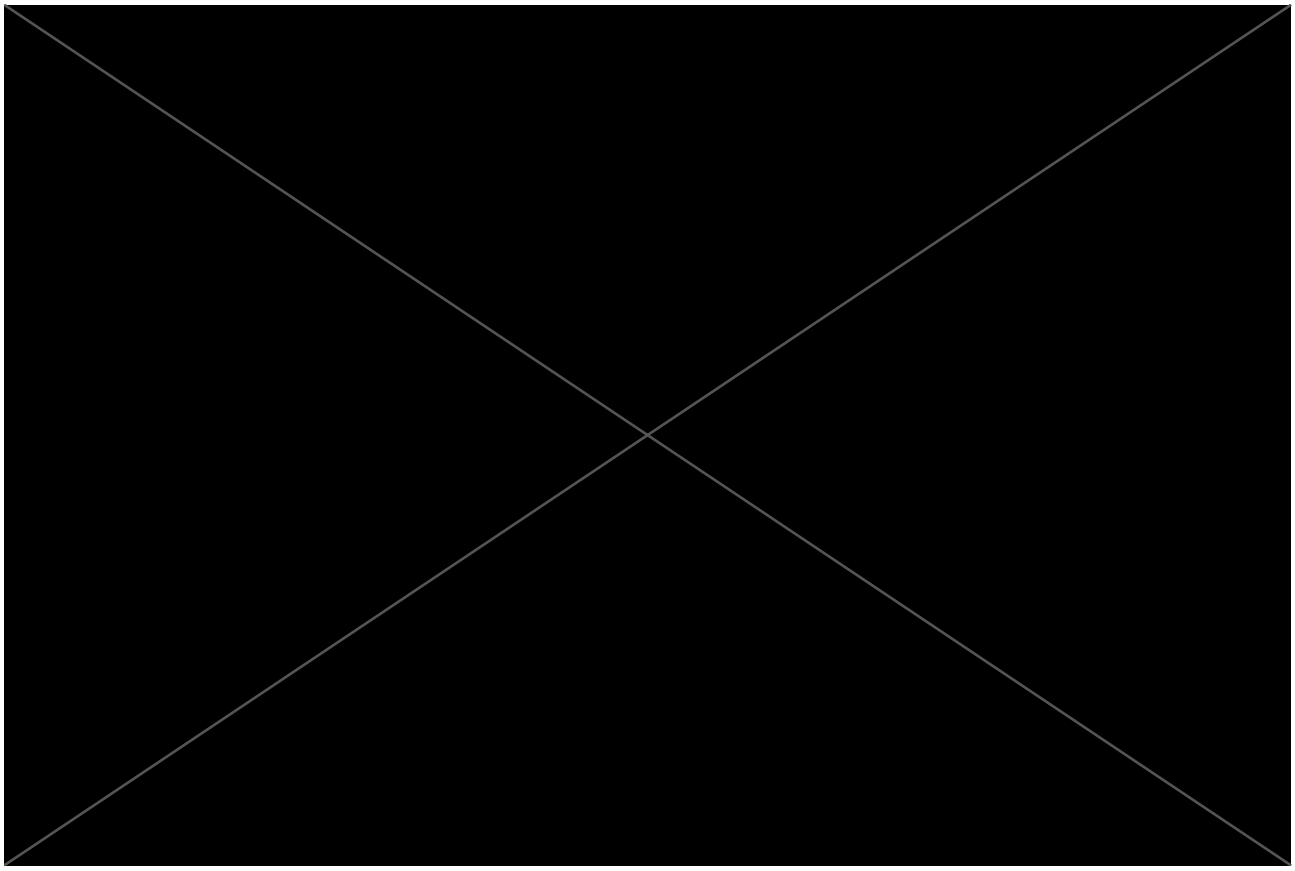

Figure 2: Colour-adapted reconstruction of the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*, adapted by author from Schreiber 1895: 176-179, pl. XCIII. Digital image via *Méditerranées*: https://mediterranees.net/art_antique/oeuvres/iliaca/schreiber_en.html

The *Ilias Latina*, meanwhile, consists of 1,070 hexameters and is an epitomised Latin retelling of the *Iliad*. A striking feature of the poem is that it does not dedicate the same number of lines to each book. Book 1 for instance, is covered in 110 lines, and Book 2 in 141; whereas Book 13 is given 7 lines and Book 17 only 3. Perhaps most significantly, lines 1-685 of the *Ilias Latina* cover Books 1-9 of the *Iliad*, while lines 696-1062 cover Books 10-24.[131]

Below are two sets of graphs: the first displays the number of lines dedicated to each book from Book 7-24 in the *Iliad, Ilias Latina*, and the second/right-hand inscribed pilaster on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*. The first/left-hand inscribed pilaster on the tablet covered Books 1-6, and is now lost, so it is only possible to draw comparisons from Book 7 onwards (Figure 3):

[131] Grillo 1988: 97.



Figure 3: Comparative distribution of *Iliad* Books 7-24 in the *Iliad, Ilias Latina*, and *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*, measured by number of lines. Graph and calculations by author.

In the second set of graphs, the *Tab. Il. Cap*. and *Il. Lat*. have been stacked onto a scaled graph, and it is clear that they mirror one another's layout much more closely than that of the *Iliad* (Figure 4):

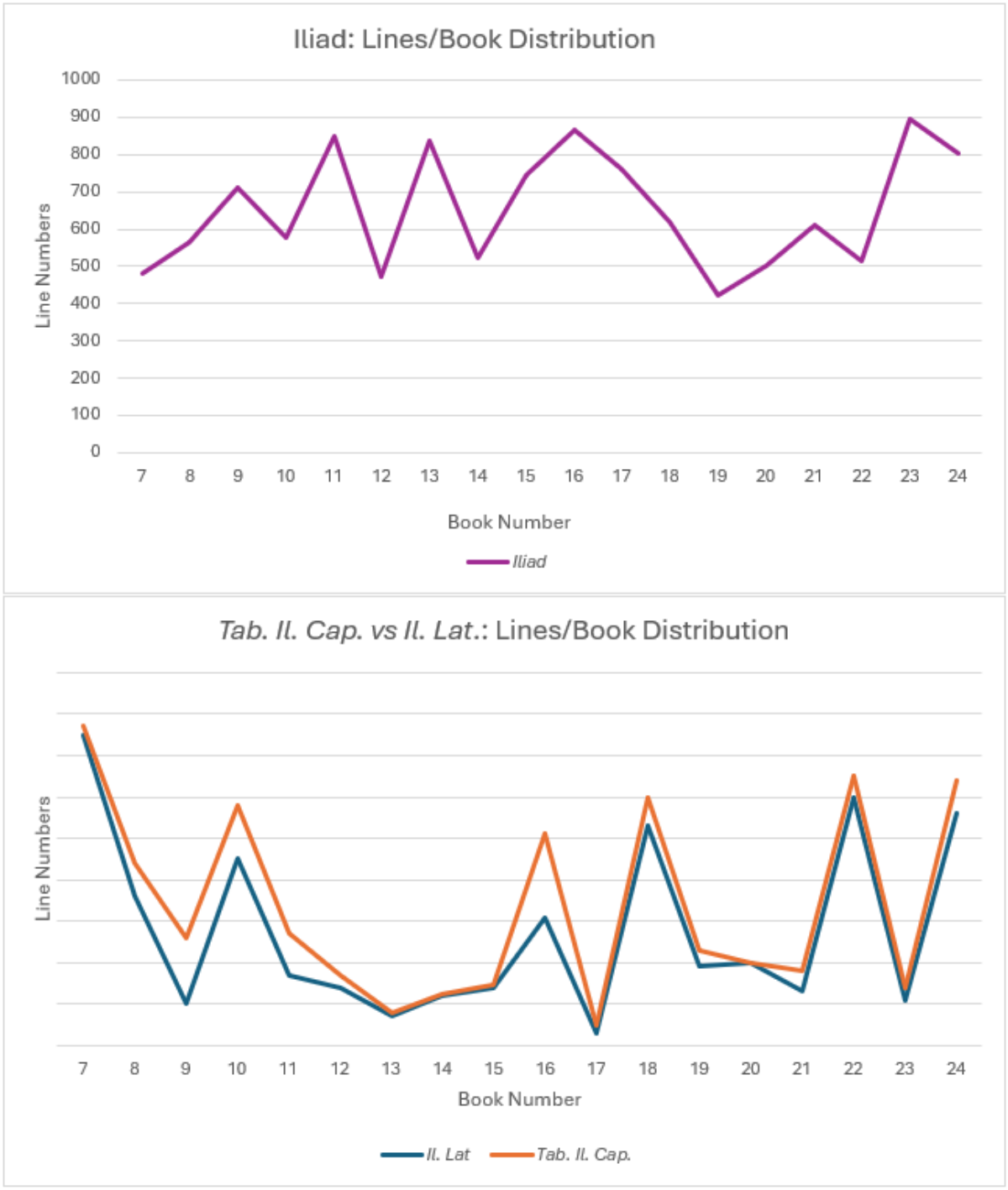

Figure 4: Comparative distribution of lines corresponding to *Iliad* Books 7-24. Upper: number of lines per book in the *Iliad*. Lower: comparative distribution of lines devoted to each *Iliad* book in the *Ilias Latina* and *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*. Graph and calculations by author.

Grillo, Valenzuela Montenegro, and U. Mancuso each noted that the prioritising of the earlier books of the *Iliad* occurred in both the *Il. Lat.* and on the *Tab. Il. Cap*.[132] The similarities between the uneven coverage of the *Iliad* on both texts has remained understated in the scholarship. Furthermore, no scholar has closely analysed the structural similarities between the surviving column and the related sections of the *Ilias Latina*. The number of lines given to each book of the *Iliad* is almost proportionately identical in both texts. To me, this presents irrefutable evidence that one of these texts engaged in a dialogue with the other when setting out its version of the Trojan War.

One of the greatest feats of the *Tab. Il. Cap* and the *Il. Lat.* lay in the rescaling of epic. The *tabula* takes the events weighted with great cultural authority and transforms them into handheld artefacts.[133] The *Il. Lat.* reduces the events of the *Iliad* from 15,693 lines to 1,070, while in the case of the *Tab. Il. Cap*., approximately 400 figures were crammed into just 40x25cm.[134]

Miniaturisation is not a matter of simply reducing physical scale. Rather, it transforms the relationship between object and viewer, rendering complex and large wholes intellectually and visually apprehensible in ways that their full-scale counterparts cannot. By transforming epic into an object capable of being surveyed almost at a glance, both works encourage new modes of viewing and reading in which patterns, correspondences, and narrative trajectories emerge. In doing so, miniaturisation invites reader/viewers to perceive the Trojan War less as an unfolding sequence of events than as a coherent whole whose significance lies in its orientation towards Rome.

Scholars in the past have had trouble understanding that the miniature nature of the tablets could have been a deliberate stylistic decision. Therefore, they have argued that they must have been copies from an original work that was much larger.[135] Subsequently, it is argued, the figures on the tablets became much too small. Perhaps this reasoning

[132] Valenzuela Montenegro 2004: 368; Mancuso 1909: 694, n.2; Grillo 1988: 97.
[133] Squire 2011: 254.
[134] Squire 2011: 248; now only c. 250 figures survive on the fragment.
[135] Squire 2011: 250.

has stemmed from a greater understanding of literary tradition. Scholars have been more comfortable (although I think incorrect) in asserting that a text such as the *Ilias Latina* must have been a direct and very low-quality imitation of the *Iliad*, and the same logic is applied also to visual material. Debate surrounding the art of the miniature is not confined to modern scholarship. By the late 1st century BCE, a specific term was coined to encapsulate the idea: *micrologia*, which was both a visual and verbal phenomenon.[136] Aelian refers to it as a waste of time:

> ὧν, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, ὁ σπουδαῖος οὐδέτερον ἐπαινέσεται· τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐστὶ ταῦτα ἢ χρόνου παρανάλωμα; (Ael. *VH*. 1.17)
> Neither of these, in my opinion, will earn the approval of a serious person. What are these things except a waste of time?[137]

Meanwhile Pliny the Elder dedicates swathes of text to the miniature achievements of Myrmecides, Callicrates, and Strabo (*HN* 7.85, 34.83, 36.43).[138] The Heracles Epitrapezios of Lysippus is another example of *micrologia*.[139] Mentioned by Martial (*Ep.* 9.43; 9.44; 14.177-178) and in a poem by Statius (*Silv*. 4.6), the Heracles Epitrapezios was a statuette that became celebrated in Latin poetry for its size. Both poets delighted in the juxtaposition between the size of the statuette and the might of its impression[140]. Statius was also fascinated by the idea that his poem could "ekphrastically evoke Lysippus' statuette – that words might communicate the visual image through verbal language."[141]

The *Tab. Il. Cap.* allows the viewer synoptic comprehension; in this case to see all of the epic stories at once. In laying everything out to be taken in by a single glance, a viewer can take in the material in front of them more quickly. The picture is worth a thousand words (or lines, in this case). Furthermore, the miniaturisation forces the viewer to read the same texts differently. The tablets are not able to simply communicate this story; instead, they place the challenge of interpretation on the viewer.[142] For Aristotle, "the size of a

[136] Squire 2011: 270-271.
[137] Translated by Nigel G. Wilson.
[138] Petrain 2014: 174.
[139] Squire 2011: 270-271.
[140] Squire 2011: 267-270.
[141] Squire 2011: 270; Squire (2011: 255-261) also refers to Pompeiian wall painting as a comparison to the *Tabulae Iliacae*, this time in terms of the significance of size. The relationship between these two visual forms will be discussed in greater detail in my second chapter.
[142] Squire 2011: 14.

poem is conceived in terms of the visibility of the plot" (Arist. *Poet*. 1450b34-1451a6). Put simply, an overly large epic is not properly visible all at once.

Miniaturisation thus also functions as a form of control. That epic has been shrunk down to a manageable size, now means it is capable of being grasped.[143] The tablets tame the richness of Greek epic, placing them now at the disposal of a Roman consumer.[144] Miniaturisation yields control to the viewer in that they are given power over the object. The viewer is turned into a giant, now dwarfing the epic heroes whom they hold in their hands.[145] The role of the viewer and the dynamics of scale between viewer and viewed are critical. The small scale of the tablet both encourages and rewards close looking. The scale dysmorphia also forces the viewer to decide how to interact with the object; does one bring it up to eye-level, or stoop downwards towards it? This visual and physical manipulation forces the change in both perspective and role, and this reinforces the reconfigured messaging in the text. The newfound superiority of Rome over the epic Greek content is physically demonstrated. A viewer seems mostly likely to bring the object up to his or her own eye level, containing the narrative in their hands and forcing it into a position that fits most comfortably for the Roman viewer.

This new role invites the viewer to actively participate with their comprehension and interpretation of the narrative. The miniature figures force a closer reading, and the omission of details gives each retained episode disproportionate meaning. Depending on which part of the tablet a viewer focusses on, coupled with their level of assumed knowledge, will dictate which gaps the viewer fills in, and the completion of the narrative becomes a collaborative process. This process also rewards a knowledgeable viewer. The more abbreviated a text becomes, the more prior knowledge it assumes, and unless you already know your Homer, the tablet will have almost no meaning. The recognition becomes a pleasure in itself, and the object flatters the viewer.

[143] Also an idea explored by Oksanish 2019: 94-118.
[144] Petrain 2014: 175.
[145] Squire 2011: 247.

Miniaturisation does not just shrink space; it also alters the experience of temporality. While the *Iliad* was likely experienced sequentially over many hours of performance, the *Tab. Il. Cap.* makes the narrative available to synoptic vision. Its multiple episodes occupy a single visual field, even if the viewer must necessarily pay attention to individual details in sequence. The tablet therefore encourages an oscillation between apprehending the composition as a whole and scrutinising its individual scenes. Likewise, the *Il. Lat*. dramatically accelerates narrative time. The viewer/reader is enabled to see patterns more clearly than a sequence of events, and in the case of the *Tab. Il. Cap*, especially, the beginning and the end are present simultaneously. In this manner of viewing, a teleological reading emerges, in which the end of the story (and the foundation of Rome) are visually in mind from the very beginning of the Trojan War.

Epitome, as a genre, was prevalent throughout Roman writing. Literary, historical, philosophical, geographical, technical, medical, and theological, and legal works were all epitomised.[146] Cicero possessed epitomes made by Fannius and Coelius Antipater (Cic. *Ep. Att.* 12.5b, 13.8.), and Plutarch tells us that Brutus also made an epitome of Polybius (Plut. *Brut.* 4.7). Varro made an epitome of his own work (Jerome *Ep*. 33.2), and Suetonius records that Sallust had requested that Ateius the Philologist make an epitome of Roman history (Suet. *Gram. et rhet.* 10.6.).[147] Other epitomes include Florus' *Epitoma de Tito Livio bellorum omnium*, Julius Paris' *Epitoma of Valerius Maximus' Facta et dicta memorabilia*, Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris*, and Lactantius' *Epitome divinarum institutionum*.[148] The function of these epitomes varies, but in the case of the *Il. Lat.* it seems clear that the author intended to supplant Homer's messaging and use of the Trojan War with his own.

The *Il. Lat.* reduces the scope of the *Iliad* by 93%, with Book 17 reduced to 3 lines and Book 13 to 7. As a result, every single line that is retained is loaded with significance. The episodes of these books (17.835-837: Ajax defending the body of Patroclus; 13.771-777: Trojans attacking the Greek camp, Neptune supplying courage to the Greeks) are

[146] Stover and Woudhuysen 2023: 44.
[147] Stover and Woudhuysen 2023: 44.
[148] Stover and Woudhuysen 2023: 45.

condensed to lend greater focus to others.[149] Book 5 (*Il. Lat.* 389-537), for example, has 149 lines dedicated to it (13.9% of the *Il. Lat*.) and contains the rage of Diomedes, the battle between Aeneas and Diomedes, the intervention of Venus, and her wounding by Diomedes, Aeneas rejoining the battle with the encouragement of Apollo, and Hector terrifying the Greeks. In contrast, Book 5 of the *Iliad* only comprises 5.79% of the entire poem.

For much of its own scope, the *Il. Lat.* focusses on visually significant moments. The ekphrastic description of the shield of Achilles receives proportionately greater attention in the *Il. Lat.* (30 verses from a total of 1,070, or 2.8%) than the *Iliad* (131 verses out of 15,693, 0.8%).[150] Visual language is prominent at crucial moments of the plot, including Aeneas being watched (*Il. Lat.* 510: *conspicit*), and Hector seeing Achilles in his new armour.

> Quem procul ut uidit tectum caelestibus armis,
> ante oculos subito uisa est Tritonia Pallas
> pertimuit clausisque fugit sua moenia circum
> infelix portis, (*Il. Lat.* 934-937)
> When he saw him from afar, protected with heavenly armour, Tritonian Pallas suddenly appeared before his eyes, he became very scared and he fled, wretched, around the walls, with the gates being shut,

It is the sight of Achilles, and of Athena, rather than sound or a sheer volume of soldiers that finally creates fear and terrifies Hector into fleeing. At the same time, his parents are forced to watch this scene from the walls, creating a layered effect in which the reader 'beholds' Priam and Hecuba watching Hector who sees Achilles, and is terrified.

> Spectant de muris miseri sua fata parentes
> pallentemque uident supremo tempore natum
> quem iam summa dies suprema luce premebat. (*Il. Lat.* 943-945)
> His wretched parents watch his fate from the walls and they see their son growing weak in his last hour, whom now his last day was pressing with its last light.

Likewise, it is sight that spurs Patroclus into action in the armour of Achilles. It is with his 'own' image, a simulacrum of Achilles, which succeeds in terrifying the Trojans.

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[149] Horn 2020: 767-773.
[150] Green 2025: 327; more discussion on this episode in a later section.

> Non ualet ulterius cladem spectare suorum
> Patroclus subitoque armis munitus Achillis
> prouolat et falsa conterret imagine Troas. (*Il. Lat*. 804-806)
> Patroclus cannot bear to watch the further slaughter of his own men, and at once, defended by the arms of Achilles, he flies forwards and utterly terrifies the Trojans with his false image.

Throughout the *Il. Lat*. it is visuality and seeing that drives forth much of the narrative. Likewise, the interaction between viewing, visual language, structure, and miniaturisation all contribute to different viewing methods of the text and tablet.

VIEWING METHODS

There are a series of ways in which the *Tab. Il. Cap*. can be viewed. If a viewer were to 'read' the tablet vertically (top to bottom and then bottom to top) in an attempt to follow the narrative, they would encounter the first 12 books of the *Iliad* in the pictorial friezes, along with the first 7 books from the description on the pilaster. This text would then be interrupted by the central *Ilioupersis* scene, and then the smaller sections dedicated to the *Little Iliad* and *Aethiopis*. The reader would then read the second pilaster from top to bottom (detailing *Iliad* Books 7-24) before viewing Books 13-24 of the same text from the bottom up on the subsequent pictorial friezes. Of course, the viewer may instead attempt to read the tablet horizontally – like a book; offering a very disrupted order of the conventional narrative. Or perhaps, they may choose to read the text in a circular fashion: either clockwise or counterclockwise.[151] Whichever way a viewer chose would offer a vastly different interpretation of the stories depicted. Of course, this also presents to the one viewer at least four differentiations on the same narrative. Far from presenting narratological errors, the tablet creates a sophisticated game for the viewer, who can glance across an assortment of visual planes, looking for repetitions of word and image, and forging new narrative associations and connections between these subjectively divergent scenes.[152] For example, following the central vertical axis of the tablet, a viewer encounters the beginning of Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon above the central panel, Aeneas escaping from Troy at its centre, and Achilles dying beneath the Scaean Gate in

[151] Squire 2011: 168-169.
[152] Squire 2011: 164-165.

the *Aethiopis* frieze below. Removed from their conventional chronological sequence, these scenes compress Achilles' Trojan career between its initial conflict and eventual death, while placing Aeneas' survival physically between them. The spatial relationship is especially suggestive – Achilles dies before the same gate through which Aeneas escapes, so that the end of the Greek hero's story is juxtaposed with the continuation of the Trojan hero's. This contrast extends into the lower part of the tablet, where Aeneas departs for Hesperia in the vicinity of the site identified with Achilles' tomb. The alternative viewing route therefore reorganises familiar Trojan material around the opposed trajectories of the two heroes: Achilles' narrative terminates at Troy, while Aeneas' moves beyond it towards the Roman future.[153]

Indeed, Petrain introduces another mode of viewing the tablet – *gramma meson*, or "middle letter".[154] The application of gramma meson speaks to the broader idea of the middle class (μέσον*)* as the privileged position with ancient viewing practices. The centre of a painting or visual representation was considered the most important focal point and is an idea that transfers to the literary with the popularity of the '*in medias res'* narrative technique, and Aristotle's belief that the middle is structurally necessary to the whole (Arist. *Poet*. 7.1450b24-34).

The principle of this viewing method expects the viewer to begin with the central panel, before expanding their concentration to how the surrounding bands and textual summaries relate back to it. This method prevents the viewer from reading the narrative sequentially.[155] That this method has been taken by Petrain from other tablets certainly suggests that the creator welcomed his viewers' attempts to engage with the tablets in this manner. All of these potential viewing methods present difficulties.[156] The conclusion must again be drawn that a viewer must need to be intimately familiar with the events of the *Iliad* in order to digest the cognitively overwhelming images of the tablet.

[153] Petrain 2014: 118.
[154] Petrain 2014: 73: "The magic squares on the reverse side of some tablets (2NY and 3C) mark the middle letter as the specific place to begin reading the enclosed message, but they offer progressively more freedom as viewers work their way to the edge of the grid."
[155] Petrain 2014: 73.
[156] Petrain 2014: 71-72.

Furthermore, the ability of the viewer to choose their own adventure regarding how they move through the tablet's content results in direct engagement and participation by the viewer. This level of participation further invites the viewer to engage with the content in a way chosen by them. 'Homer' no longer controls the narrative for this Roman viewer, who can take the information presented to them and cobble it together in a way that presents a story appealing within the new, contemporary cultural context.

The *Ilias Latina* is able to offer similar, albeit more restricted, methods of reading. Word puzzles, anagrams, and palindromes commonly featured in many Alexandrian and Hellenistic Greek poems. Acrostics, which run vertically down the page, demonstrate an intensified concern with the graphic and multilinear qualities of poetry. They enrich texts beyond writing simply as spoken word, transforming texts into graphic script.[157] Subsequently, acrostics appear just as frequently in Latin texts.[158] In recent decades, scholarship has been marked by a growing interest in acrostics and telestichs.[159] The *Il. Lat.* is, of course, a fantastic example of acrostics present in Latin Trojan War poetry. Though one would read the text conventionally – beginning to end – the presence of the acrostics in both the proem and epilogue (ITALIC*S SCRIPSIT) of the poem also invites the reader to engage with the text vertically to gauge additional meaning. Additionally, this encourages a reader to skip from beginning to end to complete the acrostic sentence. This kind of visual jump is exactly the type that is allowed for in visual art. Significantly, the *Il. Lat*. is one of the only cases in Latin literature where acrostics occur at the beginning and end of the poem, linking the end of the narrative to the very beginning and vice versa. This both incentivises the reader to read all the way and encourages a teleological reading in which the beginning of the text directly serves the ending. In this 'Romanising' reading, the Trojan War exists to set up Rome, and this is made clear through visual elements. The poem ends also with the reminder of a Roman author (SCRIPSIT) – ultimately Romans have final say and are empowered to tell this story to achieve their own contemporary means.

[157] Squire 2011: 224; see also Vogt 1966: 82-83; Courtney 1990; Danielewicz 2005.
[158] Squire 2011: 225; Antonio 1913; Zarker 1966; Guarducci 1978; Courtney 1995; Kazansky 1997: 71-74.
[159] For example, Robinson 2019: 290-308.

We can see the *Il. Lat.* as a consciously visual text. The acrostics play with the physicality of the text and link the progression of the narrative with the unfurling of the scroll on which it was written. Additionally, the acrostics take up and speak for the beginning and end of the text and leave open the very middle of the text for the reader to discover. Following Aristotle's belief in a mutually supporting beginning, middle, and end in a successful narrative, here the middle actions of the text must be linked with the Italian author and his audience. The exact middle of the *Il. Lat.* (line 535) covers the narrative events of Book 5 (indicating a greater proportionate interest in the first fifth of the *Iliad*) and more specifically, the fight between Mars and Minerva.

The literary games that are present in both the *Il. Lat.* and *Tab. Il. Cap.* prove that it has been a fallacy of modern scholarship to dismiss either of these texts as mere schoolboy exercises. Furthermore, the miniaturisation and related structures of both texts strongly imply that there were significantly greater ambitions at play in the production of both pieces, which clearly exhibit some form of dialogue with one another.

As this section hopes to demonstrate moving forward, the visual elements of the tablet encourage a viewer/reader to see the written content of the poem in more intentional ways than reading the text in isolation – the shared visual and structural elements encourage an understanding of the poem and a consciously visual one. These visual elements also serve to make the intentions of the text more deliberate and noticeable. The following sections will engage with the literary content of the *Il. Lat.* with this in mind.

It is from the content of both texts that we are able to best understand how they interacted with the Trojan War following the publication of the *Aeneid*. The intention of both the *Tab. Il. Cap.* and *Il. Lat.* seems to be broadly the same: provide a teleological Roman interpretation of the epic for a Roman audience in the contemporary political circumstances, in which Rome is backdated into the events of the Trojan War through the story of Aeneas.

Although of course the Trojans lost the war, Virgil's linking of Rome to Troy gives Rome links to the epic and glorious past that ancient Greece already had claim to, further

legitimising their place within the greater Mediterranean. In some ways, it feels as if a Latin reworking of the *Iliad*, no matter how inferior it is considered to be, is a Roman attempt to further appropriate Greek material and use it to establish their own *gravitas* and *auctoritas*.[160] The author infuses a greater Roman 'feel' and presence into the Trojan War in his *Il. Lat.*, and as a result of the *Aeneid* reinforcing the Trojan roots of Rome.

It is important to note that for the most part, the author of the *Il. Lat.* does not substantially invent new material that did not previously exist in the Homeric *Iliad*. However, given how much of the *Iliad* is cut away, the scenes and episodes that the author chooses to include are given new and particularly significant meaning. For example, Aeneas features relatively heavily in the *Il. Lat.*. The author has not invented these scenes in order to give prevalence to this well-known figure; however, he does exclude scenes that may be considered more crucial to the original poem in order to throw them into relief. Examples of these potentially notable omissions include speeches from both Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iliad* Book 1, a scene in Book 3 in which Helen appears on the walls of Troy with King Priam, the meeting of Hector and Andromache in Book 6, and the seduction of Zeus by Hera in Book 15.[161]

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

The visual correspondences identified thus far are not merely formal similarities between two works; they also shape the reader's experience of the *Ilias Latina*. This visual mode of reading becomes especially apparent in the poem's ekphrasis of Achilles' shield, where the text not only describes an image but also directs the movement of its reader's gaze across its surface. In doing so, the *Il. Lat.* transforms the shield into a microcosm of the poem's broader visual and ideological program to construct a teleological, Romanised vision of the Trojan War. Green (2025) and Rutherford (2019) summarise the description of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad:*[162]

- The Universe: earth, heaven, and sea, with a particular focus on the Sun, Moon, and constellations (markers of time) (*Il.* 18.483-489).

[160] Green 2021: 281.
[161] Kennedy 1998: 12.
[162] Green 2025: 326; Rutherford 2019: 23.

- Two cities (*Il.* 18.490-540): one at peace, with a wedding and a legal trial in process (*Il.* 18.490-508); the other at war: and siege and battle between a group of attackers and defenders (*Il.* 18.509-540).
- Three seasonal rural activities, taking place in spring, summer, and autumn: ploughing in the fields (*Il*. 18.541-549), labourers on the king's estate (*Il*. 18.550-560), and vineyard workers (*Il.* 18.561-572).
- Herdsmen leading cattle, and an attack by lions (*Il*. 18.573-586).
- Sheep at pasture (*Il.* 18.587-589).
- Young men and woman dancing, perhaps at a festival (*Il*. 18.590-606).
- Oceanus encircling the rim (*Il.* 18.607-608).

Earlier, the graphs demonstrated the way that the *Il. Lat.* dramatically cuts sections of the *Iliad* in order to lend greater focus to episodes of significance or visual prominence. The Shield of Achilles is one such scene that benefits from this approach. Proportionately, the *Il. Lat.'s* description of the shield (30 verses from a total of 1,070, or 2.8%) is three times as long as the description in the *Iliad* (131 verses out of 15,693, 0.8%).[163]

The author of the *Il. Lat.* describes the shield from the outside into the centre, in an inversion of a *gramma meson* viewing style, rather than beginning in the middle, as in the *Iliad*. The shield in the *Il. Lat.* can be described as follows:[164]

- Descriptions of the sea, sky, stars, and lands (*Il. Lat.* 862-864).
- The seasons and times (Sun, Dawn, Evening, Moon) (*Il. Lat.* 865-870).
- The sea and its deities (*Il. Lat*. 871-874).
- Wilderness and two cities at peace, with a judicial process in progress (*Il. Lat*. 875-879).
- The music of Apollo and the Muses (*Il. Lat*. 880-884).
- Agricultural activities (*Il. Lat*.885-888).
- Mars and the Fates at rest (*Il. Lat*. 889-891).

[163] McKinley 1998: 5; Green 2025: 327.
[164] As summarised by Green 2025: 327.

The prominence of Apollo on the shield is particularly suggestive within the *Ilias Latina*. The god is not simply inherited from Homeric imagery but is repeatedly given a distinctive role elsewhere in the poem: he is explicitly "Trojan Apollo" (*Troianus Apollo*: *Il. Lat*. 472, 829), protects both Aeneas and Hector in battle, and is invoked by the poet himself as the *auctor* who should inspire the work in every detail (*Il. Lat*. 166-167). His appearance within the shield therefore resonates with a broader pattern in which Apollo is aligned simultaneously with Troy. Against the god's particular prominence within Augustan and early imperial cultural discourse, his elevation within the shield contributes another distinctly Roman layer to the Latin poet's reconstruction of Achilles' arms.

Oceanus encircles the rim of the shield in both versions. Scholarly consensus agrees that the shield of Achilles was mostly likely round.[165] The author of the *Il. Lat.*, however, moves the Homeric description of Oceanus from the end of the shield ekphrasis to the beginning. An ekphrastic description of the circular shield requires the reader to traverse the shield's surface ring by ring, ultimately reaching the central image depicted on the shield.

Oceanus' framing of the shield, and his relocation from the end of the Iliadic description of the shield to the beginning at the *Il. Lat*. is also reflected on another of the *Tabulae Iliacae* – in this case, the Sarti fragment.[166] Ocean as framing device was not uncommon in Latin literature and can be seen both in Ov. *Her*. 9 and Stat. *Ach*. – to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Furthermore, the author's inclusion of the pluralised tritons (*Tritonas*: *Il. Lat*. 872) is only found in Latin poetry in Stat. *Ach*. 1.55 and Verg. *Aen*. 5.824, lending the authority of Roman Imperial literature to the poem.[167] Here, moving the ocean forward in the description not only changes its order, but also the reader's conceptualisation of the object. In this description, the shield depicts a bounded visual universe that revolves around Rome. The *Il. Lat*. asserts through this description that everything is viewed inside one single bounded cosmos, which teleologically guides the reader/viewer's eye to the heart and middle of the story.

[165] Green 2025: 327.
[166] Hardie 1985: 20-23; Squire 2011: 320-324; Green 2025: 329.
[167] Green 2025: 332.

It is Rome that occupies this middle. The author of the *Il. Lat.* creates an ideological centre that is not present in the *Iliad*, and has Achilles carry this ideology within the Trojan War. Ares and a Fate do appear in a war scene in the Iliadic shield (Hom. *Il.* 18.516, 535), but the author of the *Il. Lat.* follows Verg. *Aen.* 8.675-713 more closely in centralising Mars on the shield (*Il. Lat.* 889),[168] as well as Hesiod's shield of Heracles for the Fates (Hes. *Sc.* 249-255). On the *Il. Lat.'s* version, all the various pastoral, civic, and martial scenes visually gravitate towards Mars and the Parcae. Additionally, Ares/Mars and related deities tend to be depicted as martial figures on other ekphrastic examples of shields (Hom. *Il.* 18.516-519; Hes. *Sc.* 154-160, 191-196, 248-263; Verg. *Aen.* 8.700-703), but here, Mars stands (889*: stabat*) while the Fates are seated around him (890: *sedebant*) as a reflection of the peace promoted on other parts of the shield.[169] The contrast in posture may also be significant. Mars occupies the upright and visually dominant position at the centre of the structure, while the Fates sit around him. Their seated posture contrasts strikingly with the active Fates of Hesiod's shield, who struggle over the bodies of fallen warriors alongside the Keres (Hes. *Sc*. 248-263). Here, the Fates no longer visibly enact the ending of individual lives; instead, their power has been rendered still and arranged around Mars. Their position as seated may therefore suggest that their job – bringing lives to an end – has been suspended in the *telos* of the eternal Roman Empire. *Stabat* may also reinforce Virgilian colouring of the scene. On Aeneas' shield, Augustus stands on the lofty stern (*stans celsa in puppi*: Verg. *Aen*. 8.680). Here, Rome's divine ancestry (Mars as the father to Romulus and Remus) and the empire's fate as supreme power in the Mediterranean are both prophesied and placed at the top (or, in this case, at the centre) of the visual hierarchy.

The middle was often the privileged position in ancient viewing practices, and here, Mars is placed in the middle both through the ekphrasis but also through language: *Haec inter mediis stabat Mars aureus armis* (*Il. Lat.* 889). Green notes that one can take *mediis* as a

[168] Verg. *Aen.* 8.700: *saeuit medio in certamine Mauors*; furthermore, the author of the *Il. Lat.* shifts from the *Iliad* to the use of pluperfect verbs of making to attribute the shield to Vulcan (*caelauerat*: *Il. Lat.* 862), more closely approximating the shield to that described by Virgil in *Aen.* 8.
[169] Green 2025: 338.

transferred epithet with Mars.[170] By associating Mars with *mediis*, he is thrust *in medias res*, solidifying his importance to the narrative. Throughout the description of the shield, language is used to denote visuality. The author uses *parte alia* (*Il. Lat*. 880-881) to shift to other sections of the shield, and this phrase is well established in ekphrastic descriptions within Latin literature (Verg. *Aen*. 1.474, 8.682; Catull. 64.251; Stat. *Silv*. 2.426, 436-437). Ultimately, the *Il. Lat*. spatially privileges Rome on the shield before the Trojan War story narratively turns to Rome. In this version, Rome becomes the visual focal point around which the entire Trojan War is organised. This centrality and framing of Rome within the shield in the *Il. Lat*. visually and structurally mirrors the visual bounds set by the physical tablet (*Tab. Il. Cap.)* – the narrative is contained by the space of the tablet.

Importantly, the experience of visually beholding the shield of Achilles in the *Il. Lat*. more closely reflects the viewing experience of one beholding a tablet. In the *Iliad,* Homer shows the reader Hephaestus making the shield, however, the *Il. Lat*. describes Achilles gazing at the finished product: *quae postquam magnus Achilles / induit, in clipeum uultus conuertit atroces*. (*Il. Lat*. 860-861). Achilles, and the reader alongside him, becomes a spectator. In this respect, the scene recalls Aeneas' reception of his own completed shield in *Aeneid* 8, where Aeneas *oculos per singula uoluit / miraturque* (Verg. *Aen*. 8.618-619), visually moving through and admiring its details before finally lifting onto his shoulder the *famamque et fata nepotum* (*Aen*. 8.731). The modes of viewing between Achilles and Aeneas are not identical, however. Where Aeneas pores over his shield with wonder, Achilles turns his shield with *uultus atroces* – a fiercer gaze. The *Ilias Latina*, therefore, adopts the Virgilian structure of the hero as viewer, but changes the response. Achilles becomes, like Aeneas, the physical bearer of a visual program whose significance extends beyond his own temporality, but, unlike Aeneas, he does not register what he carries. Instead, he becomes the unknowing bearer of Rome's future, rather than the bringer of destruction to Troy. He can see the shield but cannot grasp the future significance that a Roman reader can be expected to recognise in it. This seems to be a strikingly Roman reinterpretation, which visually pushes a teleological reading resulting in Rome, at a moment in time chronologically much earlier than Virgil.

[170] Green 2025: 338.

The *Il. Lat.* does not simply 'Romanise' the Shield of Achilles by adding Roman figures or literary allusions. More importantly, it reorganises the shield to visually signpost centrality and circularity and empower the reader to interpret the Trojan War as a teleological whole whose ideological centre is already Rome. Rome is not merely the culmination of the shield's imagery, but its visual centre.

TROJANS

This centrality of Rome within the shield also extends to the treatment of Trojans more generally throughout the text. Both in the *Il. Lat.* and on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* the Trojans receive notable treatment. The text builds on this through its particularly positive treatment of the Trojans. The *Tab. Il. Cap.*, meanwhile, potentially suggests that the entire tablet is dedicated to the story of the Trojans, specifically. Within the *Il. Lat.*, Hector and Aeneas are at the forefront of the campaign on the Trojan side. Yet Hector is very clearly the author's main hero of the entire text.[171]

Hector received the very first character description of any figure in the *Ilias Latina* (*Il. Lat.* 225-232), from which point stems a catalogue of the fighting men. He is the glory of Troy (*o patriae, germane decus*: *Il. Lat.* 273; *unum quippe decus Phrygiae*: *Il. Lat.* 661), and the fear of the Greeks (*Il. Lat.* 793), he is *fortissimus* (*Il. Lat.* 486; 819), the greatest in war (*Il. Lat.* 603; 831), and undefeated in arms (*Il. Lat.* 578). Most importantly, Hector is "the one and only salvation" of Troy: *Unus tota salus in quo Troiana manebat / Hector adest* (*Il. Lat.* 930-931: "The one and only salvation was remaining in Troy, Hector is here."). When he dies, "the whole cause of the Phrygians falls with single Hector." (*Ruit omnis in uno / Hectore causa Phrygum: Il. Lat.* 1018-1019).[172] Immediately, this is reminiscent of the idea of the *unica spes* explored by Rebecca Langlands in *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome*. Langlands explains that the idea of Rome's heroes as the *unica spes*, the last and only hope for the salvation of Rome, is a motif that frequently recurs in Livy. A notable

[171] Green 2025: 25.
[172] The depiction of Hector in the *Il. Lat.* can also be tracked across the *Tab. Il. Cap.* His farewell to Andromache and Astyanax in the *Il. Lat.* can be likened more greatly to the scene on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* as opposed to the *Iliad*; in the latter, a nurse is present (*Il.* 6.399-400), but she is missing on/in both of the former depictions (*Il. Lat.* 564-574): Brüning 1894: 164-165.

example includes Livy's description of Cincinnatus as the *unica spes*.[173] Mucius is another example of this.[174] Hector's depiction in the *Il. Lat.* certainly fits into this characterisation, and his depiction as a 'classic' Roman hero, as described by Livy, certainly links the Trojans more closely to Romans and Roman heroic behaviour. This depiction also participates in the broader rehabilitation of the Trojans as proto-Romans but pushes this process further than the *Aeneid*. In *Aeneid* 12, Juno's eventual concession depends upon ethnic discontinuity. The Trojans must give up their name, language, and identity in order to be absorbed into the Latin people. The *Il. Lat.*, by contrast, retrojects recognisably Roman heroic values into the Trojan War itself. The Trojans do not merely anticipate the Romans they will one day become, but figures such as Hector are already made to behave and signify like Roman *exempla*. This further pushes teleological reading which places Rome at the heart of the entire conflict.

The singling out of the Trojans is also apparent on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* through the central and enlarged adjective "ΤΡΩΙΚΟΣ". Some scholars have attempted to explain away this adjective, supplementing "κύκλος", and asserting that it must simply have referred to the "Trojan Cycle".[175] However, as Petrain notes, the designation "Trojan Cycle" did not yet exist in antiquity. Furthermore, there are no ancient texts in which the term "Τρωϊκὸς κύκλος" seem to be employed.[176] Others, notably Otto Jahn, supplemented *pinax* in the place of κύκλος.[177] Petrain argues, convincingly, that the adjective was intentionally left unspecified: "The floating modifier spreads indiscriminately over the entire piece and, in a ploy typical of Theodorus, sanctions the whole of the artist's work with its Roman biases as 'Trojan.'"[178]

Furthermore, both sources instil a clear sense of "Romanness" throughout, beyond the characterisation of the Trojan heroic figures. Naturally, the author refers to the gods by their Roman names. In addition to this, Apollo, Mars, and Venus are emphasised the most

[173] Langlands 2018: 39.
[174] Langlands 2018: 40.
[175] Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1884: 333; Petrain 2014: 95.
[176] Petrain 2014: 95.
[177] Jahn 1873: 3; Petrain 2014: 96.
[178] Petrain 2014: 96.

throughout the *Il. Lat*. These three gods steadfastly support the Trojan cause, and while other members of the Roman *pantheon* (notably Minerva in the *Il. Lat*.) lend aid to the Greeks, this is barely mentioned by the author. The reason for the author's decision to focus on these three gods seems obvious as both Venus and Mars play a significant part in creating the founders of the Roman race, while Apollo is a patron deity of Augustus, within whose reign the *Aeneid* is published. Venus' role as mother to Aeneas, and her subsequent role as divine ancestor of Rome is made clear. She is referred to as *Venus genetrix* (*Il. Lat*. 464), and in addition to saving Paris from Menelaus, the author also includes an episode in which she rescues Aeneas from Diomedes. The prominence of Venus also contributes to the increased eroticism of the *Il. Lat*. when compared with the *Iliad*. The Latin tendency to adapt genre and eroticise epic will be discussed in the "Greeks" section of this chapter, as well as in the following chapter of the *Achilleid* and Achilles on Skyros. It is Venus' intervention in this battle that leads to her being struck by Diomedes herself.

> Ille ruit prostratus humi cum fortibus armis,
> quem Venus aetherias genetrix delapsa per auras
> accipit et nigra corpus caligine condit. (*Il. Lat*. 463-465)
> He fell prostrate onto the ground with his mighty arms, whom Venus Genetrix, having glid down through the aethereal breezes, takes and conceals his body in a black mist.[179]
>
> manum mortali uulnerat hasta. (*Il. Lat*. 469)
> He wounds heavenly hand with mortal spear.

Venus along with Apollo is described by the author as guardians of the Phrygian people (*At Venus et Phrygiae gentis tutator Apollo*: *Il. Lat*. 910), and by actively intervening in the events of the war, Venus, whose role as mother is emphasised, could be seen to be ensuring the future of the Roman people through the birthing and continued protection of Aeneas.

[179] *Condit* simultaneously recalls a burial and concealment (Ov. *Met*. 8.234-235; Phaed. *App*. 13.2; TLL 4.150.83ff), but also the city foundation. Here (*Il. Lat*. 465), Aeneas is concealed yet later buries (*condit*: Verg. *Aen*. 12.950) a sword in Turnus in an act of violence and foundation that ends the *Aeneid*.

Apollo is a god with significant links to Rome. His prominence on Achilles' shield, discussed above, forms part of a broader pattern in which the *Il. Lat*. repeatedly aligns the god with Troy, Aeneas, and the poem's own act of composition. In the *Il. Lat*., he is called "enemy to the Greeks" (*Grais inimicus Apollo*: *Il. Lat*. 614; *infesti Phoebi*: *Il. Lat*. 55, 68), and in addition to sending plague to the Greeks (*Il. Lat*. 44-46), "Trojan Apollo" (*Il. Lat*. 472, 829) also actively protects both Aeneas and Hector in battle, revitalising their strength to continue fighting.

> Dardanium Aenean seruat Troianus Apollo
> accenditque animos iterumque ad bella reducit. (*Il. Lat*. 472-473)
> Trojan Apollo protects Dardanian Aeneas and inflames his spirits, and leads him back again to the war.
>
> Quem leuat exceptum Grais inimicus Apollo
> integratque animum; (*Il. Lat*. 614-615)
> Apollo, enemy to the Greeks, lifts him up, and renews his spirit;

Apollo is also invoked by the author to be the true author of the poem, who should oversee all of its finer details: (*sitque auctor Apollo / aspiretque libens operi per singula nostro: Il. Lat*. 166: "let Apollo be the author, and willing, let him inspire our work in each detail."). The term *auctor* is significant here as it denotes a source of authority and legitimisation. The invocation transfers poetic authority from the human composer to Apollo, constructing the poem as a product of divine agency. This formulation recalls Germanicus' invocation of Tiberius as *maximus auctor* (instead of Jupiter) at the beginning of his *Aratea* (German. *Arat*. 2), where imperial authority similarly functions as the legitimising source of poetic production. Likewise, the verb *aspirare* recalls Virgil's invocation of Calliope in the *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen*. 9.525), where the Muse is asked to "breathe upon" the poet's song. The *Il. Lat.*, however, transfers this role from Muse to Apollo, emphasising the god's authority over the finished work (*per singula*). As Kennedy has argued,[180] this invocation may function as praise of Nero, whose association with Apollo was central to Julio-Claudian ideology. Yet Apollo's presence also evokes the Augustan cultural program, in which Apollo was closely associated with the emperor's own identity and the renewal of Roman literary and political order.

[180] Kennedy 1998: 10-13.

Mars, the future father of Romulus and Remus, is also evoked often. Typically, this is done through the repeated epithet of Hector: Mars-like Hector (*Mauortius Hector*: *Il. Lat.* 529, 543, 796; *Martius Hector*: *Il. Lat.* 759); though Mars is also seen to be participating in the battle (*sonat undique Mauors*: *IL* 358). He fights against Minerva (*pugnat bellipotens casta cum Pallade Mauors*: *Il. Lat.* 532), and Diomedes also recounts striking the god in a previous battle (*summo pupugit certamine Martem*: *Il. Lat.* 560). The Greeks also openly recognise that Mars is in support of the Trojan cause (*Nam licet ipse suis Mauors te protegat armis, / inuito tamen haec perimet te dextera Marte*: *Il. Lat.* 820-821: "For it is permitted that Mars himself may protect you in arms, nevertheless, this right hand will destroy you, with Mars unwilling.") Importantly, his name is often used to refer to the Trojan side of the battle:

> Hic postquam Danaum longe cedentia uidit
> agmina Tydides tumidumque increscere Martem, (*Il. Lat.* 389-390)
> Here, after the son of Tydeus saw from afar the Danaian lines fall back, and swollen
> Mars waxing strong,
>
> Vt uidit socios infesto cedere Marte, (*Il. Lat.* 495)
> When he sees his comrades fall by hostile Mars

The frequent inclusion of these three gods in only 1,070 lines certainly emphasises their involvement but also their continued importance as major gods for the Trojans-*cum*-Romans. Venus, Apollo, and Mars are not just Roman gods that have been inserted into Homer, but they form a triad of Augustan ideology that gets infused into the text. These three gods collectively reflect a distinctly Roman reorganisation of the Homeric divine landscape and embed core elements of Augustan ideology. Apollo represents the cultural authority and imperial order associated with Augustus' victory at Actium (Verg. *Aen.* 8.704-706), his Palatine temple (Prop. 2.31), and the renewal of Roman literary culture; Venus provides the genealogical link between Troy and Rome that underpins the *Aeneid*'s narrative of Aeneas and the Julian line (*Aen.* 1.254-296, 6.788-807); and Mars transforms Trojan warfare into the ancestral foundation of Roman military identity, recalling his role as the father of Romulus and Remus (Livy 1.4) and the divine ancestor of the Roman people. Through the amplification of these divine figures, the *Il. Lat.* retrospectively embeds the ideological concerns of Augustan Rome within Homeric

narrative, eroding the chronological boundary between the Trojan past and Rome's imperial present.

AENEAS

Though the *Aeneid* is not explicitly mentioned, Aeneas is given notable prevalence throughout the *Ilias Latina*. It is clear that the text is, in part, acting as a response to the *Aeneid*. Aeneas is first introduced as *sacer Aeneas* (*Il. Lat*. 236). Immediately, he is linked to the familiar identity given to him by Virgil in the *Aeneid* as *pius Aeneas*. Within the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' beauty is also a focal point in the beginning of the epic. This aspect of his characterisation is also touched on by the author, who refers to him as *Veneris pulcherrima proles* (*Il. Lat*. 483). The author is drawing from the *Aeneid*, rather than the *Iliad*, for his characterisation of Aeneas, but by doing so, he is integrating the two epics together more closely, further legitimising Virgil's depiction of Aeneas and subsequently legitimising Rome's position in grand and epic history. More specifically, the *Ilias Latina* retrospectively embeds Virgil's Roman Aeneas within the narrative world of the Trojan War. There is a specific point at which Aeneas' identity as a figure with future significance to the Romans is alluded to:

> Quem nisi seruasset magnarum rector aquarum,
> ut profugus laetis Troiam repararet in aruis
> Augustumque genus claris submitteret astris,
> non clarae gentis nobis mansisset origo. (*Il. Lat*. 898-901)
> Whom unless the ruler of the great sea had protected him, so that he might restore Troy in happy lands as an exile, and raise the Augustan race to the gleaming stars, the origin of a famous nation would have been lost to us.[181]

This passage is particularly striking because it goes considerably beyond its Homeric model. In the *Iliad*, Poseidon similarly preserves Aeneas because he is destined to survive and because his descendants will continue the Trojan line (Hom. *Il*. 20.302–308), but the prophecy extends no further than this. The *Il. Lat*. retrospectively fills that Homeric future with Roman history. The description of Aeneas as *profugus* recalls the *Italiam fato profugus* of the *Aeneid* (*Aen* 1.2), transforming his Homeric survival into the

[181] The reference to the Augustan race undoubtedly refers to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, reinforcing the belief that the author most likely was not writing after the death of Nero at the latest.

first stage of the Virgilian journey ordained by fate. Aeneas is preserved so that Troy might be refounded, and the Augustan dynasty might reach the stars. The effect is to retroject the teleology of the *Aeneid* into the narrative world of the *Iliad*, making Rome's future appear already implicit within the Trojan War.

The Virgilian resonance of *profugus* also brings fate to the centre of the passage. In the opening of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is *fato profugus* – his exile and movement towards Italy are explicit consequences of fate. The *Il. Lat*. therefore imports Virgilian language into its Homeric narrative, and also the teleological structure that language encodes. This concern with fate is established much earlier in the poem. Near the beginning of the poem, Troy's inevitable defeat by Greece (due to fate rather than any of their own failings) is alluded to: *His se defendit ducibus Neptunia Troia / uicissetque dolos Danaum, ni fata fuissent* ("With these leaders, Neptunian Troy defended herself, and it would have defeated the deceit of the Greeks, had the fates not been so": *Il. Lat*. 250-251:).

The construction of this statement through an unreal conditional (*ni fata fuissent*) is significant. Rather than simply recounting Troy's destruction, the poem briefly imagines a version in which Troy survives, only to immediately negate that possibility through the overwhelming authority of fate. This emphasis on fate also anticipates the prominence of the Parcae on Achilles' shield, where they occupy a central and stable position. In both cases, the poem allows alternative outcomes to be imagined but ultimately presents the course from Troy to Rome as fixed by fate. Such counterfactual constructions occur within the *Il. Lat*. to create moments in which unrealised possibilities are briefly brought into view before being closed off by the reader's pre-existing knowledge. These digressions function as a form of narrative side-shadowing, or an indicator of paths not taken, and rather than undermine the poem's teleological structure, they reinforce it by demonstrating that every possible deviation from the known course of events is ultimately contained within the workings of fate. The Fates are also mentioned in line 890. Later, the author elaborates on the role of fate in this war:

> Inde acies uidet Iliacas dextraque potenti
> sustinet auratas aequato pondere lances
> fataque dura Phrygum casusque expendit Achiuum

> et Graium clades grauibus praeponderat armis. (*Il. Lat*. 655-658)
> From there he sees the Ilian lines, and with his powerful right hand he holds up the golden scales, evenly weighted, and he weighs out the harsh fate of the Phrygians and the plight of the Achaeans, and disaster for the Greeks outweighs with heavy arms.

The *Il. Lat.'s* adaptation of Jupiter's weighing of the fates provides another example of the poem's tendency to transform Homeric scenes into images of historical teleology. The passage closely recalls Zeus' weighing of the fates of the Trojans and Achaeans in the *Iliad*, where Zeus places his golden scales to measure the two destinies of death before the Achaeans' fate sinks (Hom. *Il.* 8.68-64). In the *Il. Lat.*, however, this Iliadic moment is expanded beyond the immediate circumstances of battle. Jupiter does not only determine the outcome of a single encounter, but "weighs out" (*expendit*) the "harsh fate of the Phrygians" and the "misfortunes of the Achaeans" (*fataque dura Phrygum casusque expendit Achiuum*: *Il. Lat*. 657). The vocabulary of *fata*, *casus*, and *clades* transforms the scene from a momentary reversal in the Trojan War into a broader deliberation upon the destiny of both peoples. Moreover, the statement that "the disaster of the Greeks outweighs with heavy arms" (*et Graium clades grauibus praeponderat armis*: *Il. Lat*. 658) encourages a Roman reader to view Greek defeat within a larger historical framework. While this does not explicitly refer to Rome's later conquest of Greece, the language invites a retrospective reading in which Greek suffering forms part of the historical trajectory through which Troy's legacy survives through subsequent Roman power. The scales therefore become a visual representation of an Iliadic moment that has been reconfigured to reveal the inevitable movement from Trojan defeat towards Roman success.

Throughout the *Ilias Latina*, Diomedes is consistently described as the foremost Greek warrior. He, along with Achilles, is referred to as a *heros* most frequently and the majority of fighting scenes are concerned with him. (*Il. Lat*. 389-416; 441-462; 530-531; 553-564; 665-669; 1007-1008). He is described as first among the Greeks (*princeps*: *Il. Lat*. 665), and the extent of his rage is often emphasised (*infestus*: *Il. Lat*. 447; *demens*: *Il. Lat*. 468). Similarly, Aeneas is characterised as a competent Trojan warrior who matches even Hector in skill and bravery. The descriptions place emphasis on his visual brilliance:

> Emicat interea Veneris pulcherrima proles
> densaque Graiorum premit agmina nudaque late
> terga metit gladio funestaque proelia miscet.
> Nec cessat spes una Phrygum fortissimus Hector
> sternere caede uiros atque agmina uertere Graium. (*Il. Lat*.483-487)
> Meanwhile, the most handsome son of Venus shines forth and presses back the dense rank of Greeks and far and wide he mows down their bare backs with his sword and stirs up deadly battle. Nor does the bravest Hector, one hope of the Phrygians, cease to scatter men in slaughter and turn around the Greek ranks.

At lines 454-462, Diomedes and Aeneas stand against one another in single combat.

> Iamque manum Aeneas simul et Calydonius heros
> contulerant, iactis inter se comminus hastis;
> undique rimabant inimico corpora ferro,
> et modo cedebant retro, modo deinde coibant.
> Postquam utrique diu steterant nec uulnera magnus
> qua daret infesto Tydides ense uidebat,
> saxum ingens medio quod forte iacebat in agro,
> bis seni quod uix iuuenes tellure mouerent,
> sustulit et magno conamine misit in hostem. (*Il. Lat*. 454-462)
> And now at the same time, Aeneas and the Calydonian hero had brought their hands together, having hurled spears amongst themselves at close quarters; from every side they sought the other's body with hostile sword, and at one moment they fall back, at another they came together. After each had stood firm for a long time, and great Diomedes did not see where he could give a wound with his dangerous sword, he lifted up a huge rock that by chance was laying in the middle of the field, that twelve youths would scarcely move from the ground, and with great exertion he hurled it at his foe.

The encounter is initially rendered with a degree of simultaneity and stasis. Aeneas and Diomedes engage *simul* (454), while their repeated advances and retreats (*modo cedebant retro, modo deinde coibant*: 457) produce an almost symmetrical movement around the two opposing figures. This movement then gives way to stillness: *postquam utrique diu steterant* (458). The verb *steterant* freezes the combatants momentarily within the narrative, allowing them to be apprehended almost as figures in a visual tableau before Diomedes' subsequent action restores narrative movement. As elsewhere in the poem, *stare* contributes to a distinctly pictorial mode of presentation, in which narrative actors are temporarily fixed for the reader's gaze.

Magno conamine here seems to function as a reference to the collocation found at Ov. *Met*. 3.60, in which Ovid reports Cadmus' mighty throw of a stone against the serpent.[182] Here, Diomedes acts in the likeness of Cadmus, the legendary founder of Thebes, by using a massive stone to hurl at his foe. This reference seems strange, given Aeneas should function as the most likely candidate to represent the legendary founder of a city. Though, interestingly, prior to the Trojan War, Diomedes fought *against* Thebes, the city of Cadmus, as one of the *epigoni* who sought to avenge their slain fathers (the champions and Seven Against Thebes). The allusion creates a complex chain of heroic associations, in which Diomedes occupies the visual and verbal space of both Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, and Aeneas, the future founder of Rome. The Ovidian allusion temporarily allows Diomedes to occupy the position of founder, but the wider narrative denies him its teleological significance. His resemblance to Cadmus is confined to an act of spectacular martial violence – the throwing of the stone – whereas Aeneas' significance lies beyond the immediate combat and in the future survival and foundation already known to the Roman reader. The confrontation thus sets two different models of heroic action against one another. Diomedes can reproduce the gesture of a legendary founder, but Aeneas alone possesses the historical future of one. The text thus uses intertextual compression to position Aeneas' future destiny against his Greek opponent. Furthermore, Diomedes is named as *Calydonius heros* (*Il. Lat*. 454), while Aeneas is identified simply by his name. The geographically marking *Calydonius heros* anchors Diomedes in a specifically Greek heroic context, against which Aeneas' future significance can be defined.

At first glance, it seems unexpected that Diomedes should receive such consistent attention from the author of the *Il. Lat.*, but I would speculate that, by raising Diomedes up to unprecedented martial excellence (he boasts of injuring both Venus and Mars),[183] it makes Aeneas all the more impressive as a warrior for being able to stand against him. Ultimately, Venus intervenes and takes Aeneas from the battle once Diomedes strikes

[182] *Conamine* also found in Stat. *Theb*. 5.558 (with *ingenti*); first found in Lucretius (TLL 4.1.10ff): Green 2025: 235.
[183] *Hospitis arma uides, Veneris qui uulnere dextram / perculit et summo pupugit certamine Martem*. (*Il. Lat*. 559-560).

him with a rock. However, prior to this, Diomedes and Aeneas fight for a long time, and Diomedes is unable to find a weakness in Aeneas' fighting that would allow him to strike a successful blow against him. Later in the *Il. Lat*., several moments within the *Iliad* are omitted,[184] to instead draw attention to Aeneas' encounter with Achilles (as a summary of Hom. *Il.* 20.75-287). In the *Il. Lat*., Aeneas is driven back and seeks the aid of the divine river, yet Green argues that, in this encounter, greater prowess is lent to Rome's founder figure,[185] and that Aeneas' valour is augmented (*Il. Lat.* 895-898), in order to set up a "flattering projection of Aeneas' role as founder of Rome and the Augustan race" (*Il. Lat.* 899-902).[186] I would argue that, despite the outcome remaining the same, the episode between Aeneas and Diomedes functions similarly. In the *Iliad*, the episode, from the moment Aeneas and Diomedes engage in battle to Venus' removal of her son from the battlefield, takes up 21 lines (Hom. *Il.* 5.297-317; whereas in the *Il. Lat.* it is given a proportionately high 12 lines (*Il. Lat.* 454-465). The amount of time dedicated to the episode, in addition to the focus given to Aeneas' bravery and prowess against these great warriors sets up the Roman founder as courageous and also favoured by the gods.

The frequency of Aeneas extends beyond the *Ilias Latina* and is also reflected on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*. Though the *Tab. Il. Cap*. also does not explicitly mention the *Aeneid*, intertextuality between Virgil and the tablet is evident. Much of the discussion surrounding the *Tab. Il. Cap*. has been concerned with whether the *tabula* can be viewed as an accurate recapitulation of Stesichorus' lost *Ilioupersis*.[187] This is due predominantly to the heavy emphasis placed on Aeneas in the central *Ilioupersis* scene. Horsfall in particular stresses that a comparison between the *Tab. Il. Cap*. and what we do know of the *Ilioupersis* fails to lend Theodorus any credibility.[188] However, as we have already seen, any assumptions that the intent of the creator was to perfectly replicate the texts inspiring the work have proven erroneous. Regardless of this discussion, the specific similarities to the lost Stesichorean poem are not the concern of this chapter. However, I

[184] The assembly of Greeks, the reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon, the pre-battle feast (Hom. *Il.* 19) are reduced to a brief mention (*Il. Lat.* 894-895), and all divine interactions across *Il.* 19-20 are removed: Green 2025: 339.
[185] Green 2025: 340.
[186] Green 2025: 339.
[187] Horsfall 1979a: 26, 38-43.
[188] Horsfall 1979a: 38.

would claim that the emphasis on Aeneas in the panel was a specifically Theodorean innovation.

It is clear here that a Virgilian framework quickly takes root; the centrality of Aeneas is sufficient to establish a Virgilian context to the events of the tablet.[189] Furthermore, it seems to me that anything produced in Rome pertaining to the Trojan War cannot be viewed without considering the influence of the *Aeneid* and the ways this shaped Roman perceptions of the Trojan War and their involvement in it. Within the contested *Ilioupersis* scene Aeneas is depicted three times within the same episode in the same costume.[190]

1. On the left-hand side of the scene, just above centre and within the walls of Troy, Aeneas (highlighted, Figure 2) receives a large cylindrical box from a kneeling Trojan. This scene likely illustrates *Aeneid* 2.318-321: *ecce autem telis Panthus elapsus Achiuum, / Panthus Othryades, arcis Phoebique sacerdos, / sacra manu uictosque deos paruumque nepotem / ipse trahit*.[191] The cylindrical box, or *sacra*, are the *Penates* of Troy.

2. In the very middle of the panel, in the most privileged viewing position, Aeneas is depicted fleeing the city with Anchises, who now clutches the *Penates* on his shoulder, and with Ascanius in hand. This is the aforementioned scene which seems likely to have been based off the monumental statue group in the Augustan forum.[192]

Horsfall also notes that the indistinct figure behind Aeneas and Ascanius in the centre of the panel may have been Creusa.[193] This figure was present behind the pair as they exit the gates of Troy; however, she was certainly no longer present in the following scene in which Aeneas departs Troy. Horsfall cautions that this claim, though highly ingenious and attractive if true, is far from proven.[194] Indeed, in this instance, I am persuaded to agree

[189] Squire 2011: 156.
[190] Squire 2011: 154.
[191] Horsfall 1979a: 39.
[192] Petrain 2014: 7.
[193] Horsfall 1979a: 41; Sadurska 1964: 29.
[194] Horsfall 1979a: 41.

with Horsfall that this figure is most likely Creusa. The figure is clearly a female, and unlikely to be a goddess, given that she is weeping with her head down, and due to the fact that the group is already being led away by another god, Mercury. This characterisation would also fit more closely with Virgilian intertextuality. Here, Creusa may denote the end of Aeneas' Trojan life, and symbolise his moving to the Roman one, which Creusa does not accompany (Verg. *Aen*. 2.768-788).

This scene does differ from the *Aeneid* with the presence of Mercury, who appears in the escape scene on the *tabula*, but not in the Virgilian text.[195] Petrain notes that Mercury, "the divine guide *par excellence*", appears on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* in only one other location: In the pictorial depiction of *Iliad* Book 24 he attends Priam at the tent of Achilles. Petrain suggests that Mercury plays a dual role, therefore, highlighting that, "while Homer's story is ending, Aeneas' is moving ahead."[196]

3. Finally, Aeneas is the central figure amongst a group boarding a ship in the bottom left-hand corner of the panel. Amongst the three main figures (Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius) is also Misenus, holding what looks to be a trumpet. Over the entire scene the following in inscribed:

> ΑΙΝΗΑΣ ΣΥΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΙΔΙΟΙΣ ΑΠΑΙΡΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΕΣΠΕΡΙΑΝ
> Aeneas together with his comrades departing for Hesperia [the land of the West].[197]

Misenus appeared also in the *Aeneid* as Aeneas' trumpeter and companion (*Aen*. 6.164-165), further corroborating the links between the tablet and the *Aeneid*.

The viewing method of *gramma meson* becomes particularly pertinent in the analysis of Aeneas on the tablet. If this mode is followed, Aeneas is marked at the starting point for all of the surrounding material. From this, it can be argued that Aeneas, Rome's national

[195] Horsfall (1979a: 41-43) highlights two other places in ancient literature where he has been connected with this episode: in Marcellus of Side's poem on the death of Herodes Atticus' wife Regilla (24-6), and on a fragmentary painting from the Casa del Criptoportico; again, links between the *Tab. Il. Cap*. and wall paintings at Pompeii are detectable here.
[196] Petrain 2014: 129.
[197] Horsfall 1979a: 39: the word first appears in Agathyllus Arcas 3.311 as an adjective meaning "Western". It also appears in Ennius (*Ann*. 23) and Virgil (*Aen*. 1. 530, 3.163).

hero, becomes the central focus and culmination of the Greek epic.[198] Even further, his departure from Troy was the conclusion towards which the entire Cycle was heading all along.[199] At the very least, the fact that Aeneas' departure from Troy was placed in the central scene on the central panel certainly reflects his importance in contemporary legend as dynastic propaganda.[200] Crucially, both the *Tab. Il. Cap.* and *Il. Lat.* strive to present a teleological version of the *Iliad* in which the entire purpose of the story is retrospectively moved to become about Aeneas and the subsequent founding of Rome.

The multiple appearances of Aeneas on the central panel can be seen as an example of continuous narrative; that is, a narrative in which several scenes involved the same, repeated characters united in a single space.[201] This narrative is interpreted differently by scholars. Petrain refers to the third scene (Aeneas's departure) as truly final, as it concludes the movement of Aeneas across the panel in the two other scenes into "the ending". He refers to this end as "an ending *in medias res*"; Aeneas is headed somewhere that the viewer cannot see: "the Land of the West."[202] Squire, meanwhile, argues that this tablet sings "the perpetual song".[203] He explains that the upper frieze of the tablet (a depiction of *Iliad* Book 1) links the beginning and end of the *Iliad*. The acrostics of *the Il. Lat.* similarly link the beginning to the end of the text visually. The idea of circularity that this expresses perhaps also suggests a regeneration, rather than 'the end', for the Trojans, who experience a rebirth through Aeneas' alluded founding of Rome. Here the visually circular viewing method highlights the circular narrative. In addition to this, the central image of Aeneas associates the sack of Troy with the eventual subsequent founding of Rome.[204] Furthermore, iconographic parallels across the tablet fuse together events from the *Ilioupersis, Iliad, Aethiopis*, and *Little Iliad*, and by expanding beyond Homer, the tablet creates a collective literary landscape which offers a "circular and kaleidoscopic vision of the Trojan epic past."[205] Horsfall likewise suggests the overall composition of the

[198] Petrain 2014: 91, 130.
[199] Petrain 2014: 136.
[200] Horsfall 1979b: 375.
[201] Petrain 2014: 105.
[202] Petrain 2014: 135.
[203] Squire 2011: 253.
[204] Squire 2011: 253.
[205] Squire 2011: 253.

tablet encircles Aeneas' departure. However, he also remains loath to concede that Theodorus could have consciously pulled off such an intentionally witty composition: "here Theodorus *may* be perpetrating a minor verbal/visual pun."[206] Here Horsfall manages to contradict his own overarching argument that the tablets were intended for a wholly uneducated viewer. A central focus on Aeneas would have required a knowledge of Virgil, as well as of contemporary political events; not to mention the ability to engage with a rather complex viewing model and with a diverse set of obscure Greek texts. Surely all of this was beyond Horsfall's envisioned Trimalchio-esque, nouveau rich owner? Moreover, the conscious decision to meld the revisionism of Virgil and authority of Homer together on a visual artefact seems an unquestionably sophisticated and erudite decision.

Furthermore, Aeneas is not only given a key role on the central panel of the tablet, but he is also consistently emphasised across the other sections of the tablet.[207] The tablet features Aeneas in the pictorial friezes on Books 13, 15, and 20. This is despite the fact that his battle with Aphareus only takes up four verses in *Iliad* Book 13 (*Il.* 13.541-544). Moreover, his participation in the battle before the Greek ships, depicted in the pictorial band for Book 15 is not even mentioned explicitly in the *Iliad*.[208] Here, visual frequency is used to establish the work's aims – reframe the narrative for Romans and to centralise the figure of Aeneas, the eventual founder of Rome.

Where Ulysses typically becomes the wandering hero following on from the Trojan War, here it is Aeneas.[209] This, along with Aeneas' emphatic centrality on the tablet, reframes the Greek epic landscape and places Rome at its heart.[210] The centralising of Aeneas becomes a common denominator between the *Il. Lat.* and the *Tab. Il. Cap.*, which both force its viewer/reader to consider the Trojan War in light of the contemporary Augustan political context and the newly mythologised genealogy of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.[211]

[206] Horsfall 1979a: 37.
[207] Galinsky 1969: 32, 34; Petrain 2014: 89.
[208] Petrain 2014: 64.
[209] Squire 2011: 154.
[210] Squire 2011: 154.
[211] Squire 2011: 154.

Though the *Tab. Il. Cap*. openly presents the texts of Homer, Stesichorus, Arctinus, and Lesches, it is impossible to ignore the unspoken authority that is undoubtedly Virgil's. By extension then, it is impossible to ignore the unspoken authority that the tablet has given to future Roman interpretations of the Trojan War. Furthermore, the viewer may note the presence of an uninscribed column standing beside Aeneas as he boards his ship. The fact that the column has been left uninscribed is conspicuous when compared to the heavily inscribed larger right-hand column above. Squire suggests that: "there is room on this miniature monumental tablet within the tablet for infinite (and unprescribed) narrative expansion."[212] This column stands on the tablet as a visual marker to indicate the texts that are to follow this visual piece of work. I would suggest, then, that the *Ilias Latina* is just one such text that seeks to bring further life to the blank spaces consciously left by the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*.

GREEKS

The Romanisation of the Greek epic can be further read into through close reading of the *Il. Lat.'s* treatment of its Greek characters, and the resulting elegisation and eroticisation of the epic themes of the *Iliad*. Perhaps the most notable way the author of the *Il. Lat.* demonstrates that this text is by a Roman, for Romans, is through his treatment of the Greek heroic figures. This is also perhaps where derivation from the original source material is most clear.

From the very beginning of the *Il. Lat*., the author reinterprets the opening of the *Iliad* as erotic, forsaking the ideals and beliefs that drove the Homeric heroes in the same, Iliadic conflict. Rather than pride and ideas of honour sparking the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, it is uncontrollable lust.[213] After scorning Chryses, Agamemnon is commanded to return Chryseis to him; however, "the violence of the king blazed up at once" (*Il. Lat.* 58), and in direct defiance to Apollo, he refuses. He refuses, not on the grounds that it was his right to capture and keep the girl, but because "wild love clings to his innermost bones, and ruinous lust spurns prayers." (*ferus ossibus imis*

[212] Squire 2011: 154.
[213] Cè 2021: 47.

/ haeret amor spernitque preces damnosa libido: *Il. Lat.* 25-26). Agamemnon is driven by *ferus* love (*amor*), usually used to mean wild, savage, uncivilised or uncontrolled. Furthermore, he allows ruinous lust (*damnosa libido*) to spurn prayers and refuse commands of the gods. Once he is forced (*cogitur*: *Il. Lat.* 63) to send her back by the other leaders, who fear that the health of the Greeks is nearly extinguished (*prope consumptae uires*: *Il. Lat.* 69), he continues to yearn for her and still lusts after her: *non tamen Atridae Chryseidis excidit ardor: / maeret et amissos deceptus luget amores* (*Il. Lat.* 70-71). As a consolation prize, Agamemnon famously takes the girl captured by Achilles instead. However, in the *Il. Lat.*, when he robs Achilles of Briseis (*rapta magnum Briseide priuat Achillem*: *Il. Lat.* 72) it is seemingly not as an act of retaliation for spurned pride; it is so that he may "soothe his own fire with another's flames" (*solaturque quos alienis ignibus ignes*: *Il. Lat.* 73). In addition to allowing plague to decimate the Greek population, ignoring the prayers of a supplicant, as well as the will of Apollo, Agamemnon was also willing to allow his lust to spark conflict with the greatest Greek warrior and jeopardise his entire Trojan campaign: *turpem caecus amor famam liquisset in aeuum / gentibus Argolicis*: *Il. Lat.* 79-80 ("blind lust would have left a shameful reputation on the people of the Argolid for an eternity."). This formulation provides another example of the poem's recurrent use of unreal conditions to expose alternative narrative possibilities. Had Minerva not intervened, Achilles' response to Agamemnon might have diverted the Trojan narrative onto a radically different course; as elsewhere in the poem, however, the counterfactual possibility is raised only to be immediately excluded by divine intervention. Such counterfactual constructions recur at significant moments in the *Ilias Latina*, repeatedly opening alternative narrative trajectories before closing them through divine intervention or fate.

Furthermore, Achilles' eruption of anger at this action seems also to be focussed on the loss of Briseis and what that means for himself, rather than as an act against his honour. Later when he is sitting out of the battle, Achilles remains in his tent soothing the hardship of his lost love with his lyre (*et cithara dulci durum lenibat amorem*: *Il. Lat.* 586). When Thetis implores Jupiter to act in retaliation, it is the violation of "the flames" of Achilles that she seeks vengeance for: *ulciscere meque meumque / corpus ab Atrida, quodsi permittitur illi / ut flammas impune mei uiolarite Achillis, / turpiter occiderit superata*

libidine uirtus: *Il. Lat.* 89-92 ("avenge me and my son against the son of Atreus, for if he is permitted to violate the flames of my Achilles with impunity, virtue will die disgracefully, overcome by lust."). Words associated with fire and burning are used here and throughout (*ardor: Il. Lat.* 70, 143, 174, 601*; ignis: Il. Lat. 73, 692; flamma: Il. Lat.* 91, 338*; ardere: Il. Lat.* 141, 312, 386, 811*; exardescere: Il. Lat.* 58) to denote this intense emotion and feelings of lust.[214] Other Roman poets interpret the Trojan War in similar terms to the author of the *Il. Lat.*, signifying the new Roman prioritisation of passion and love.[215] Steven Green notes that Horace (*Epist.* 12) also used abstract nouns (*amor, aestus, ira, seditio, solus, scelus, libido*) to denote destructive passions – chief among which were erotic infatuation and anger.[216] He notes that Ovid (*Tr.* 2.371-374) too construed the *Iliad* as a text about a fight between a lover and her husband.[217] The *Il. Lat.* can be read, then, as pushing a characteristically Ovidian tendency to reread earlier literature through an erotic lens to an extreme conclusion. Where Ovid repeatedly recasts earlier literary traditions through the language and structures of erotic experience, the *Il. Lat.* makes that eroticising perspective fundamental to its retelling of the *Iliad*. Achilles' anger is consequently reframed not simply as wounded honour, but as the suffering of a lover, while the wider conflict becomes increasingly driven by the vocabulary of passion, desire, and erotic rivalry.

Importantly, the *Tab. Il. Cap.* shows the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles to have progressed further than it had in the *Iliad (Il.* 1.188-222). On the tablet, Agamemnon appears ready to defend himself with his sword. This is in keeping with *Il. Lat.* 77.[218] Furthermore, A. Brüning points out that the depiction of Chryses on the *Tab. Il. Cap.* is more consistent with the description of him given in the *Il. Lat.*, rather than *the Iliad* (1.33-42*)*. Specifically, the pictorial representation of the prayer of Chryses matches exactly to that of the *Il. Lat.* (27-43).[219]

[214] Green 2025: 27.
[215] Green 2025: 9.
[216] Green 2025: 7.
[217] Green 2025: 9.
[218] Brüning 1894: 164-165.
[219] Brüning 1894: 164-165.

At one point, Agamemnon is referred to as *aeger* ("the sick man"; *Il. Lat*. 63). *Aeger* is used also in Ennius (Trag. fr.89 Goldberg/Manuwald), Virgil (*G.* 4.464; *Aen*. 1.351-352, 4.35, 4.389), Propertius (2.4.11), and Valerius Flaccus (7.5) to describe the anguish of the separation from a lover.[220] Here, Agamemnon is sick due to lust and his inability to control his desires for Chryseis and then Briseis. None of the other leaders attending the council are referred to in this way, and the greater context – *tandem clamore represso / cogitur inuitos aeger dimittere amores* (*Il. Lat*. 62-63) ("Finally when the clamour is repressed, the sick man is forced to give up his unwelcome lusts") – suggests that Agamemnon is *aeger* not from a physical illness but from his own unconstrained lust and lack of restraint as king. If this is so, the character of Agamemnon seems to have been set up by the author in a way that directly places him and Achilles as a warning, showcasing the dangers of allowing uncontrolled emotion to govern one's actions.[221] The description of Agamemnon as *aeger* also introduces the language of Roman elegy into the epic framework of the *Il. Lat*. By presenting Agamemnon's desire as a form of sickness caused by uncontrollable passion, the poet draws upon a tradition in which erotic longing renders the lover physically and emotionally afflicted. In this respect, Agamemnon's inability to govern his desire for Chryseis and Briseis recalls the elegiac lover whose lack of self-mastery places him under the domination of passion, thereby recasting the Homeric conflict through a distinctly Roman conception of love and emotional excess. The *Il. Lat*. thus participates in a broader Roman process of elegising epic, in which the traditional conflicts of heroic narrative are reframed through the language of erotic suffering, loss of self-control, and emotional vulnerability – a development that I will explore in full in the following chapter.

Generally, the author's Greeks seem to display more questionable behaviour or characteristics than their Trojan counterparts. Near the beginning the deceit of the Greeks is referenced (*dolos Danaum*: *Il. Lat*. 251), which is an addition of the author. Another addition by the author is the description of Ulysses, which seems to have been adopted from Virgil. He is mentioned only a handful of times but is given the epithet: *commentor fraudis* (*Il. Lat*. 527, 579: "devisor of deceit"). *Commentor* is rare, and the only

[220] Green 2025: 121.
[221] Green 2021: 282.

other use of *commentor* as a noun is Ov. *Fast.* 3.785 and is used to attribute Bacchus as *uuae commentor* ("discoverer of the grape"). Green suggests this follows the Latin tradition to attribute *'-tor'* nouns to Ulysses: *inuentor scelerum*: Verg. *Aen.* 2.164; *hortator scelerum*: *Aen*. 6.529; *fictor: Aen*. 9.602; *hortator scelerum*: Ov. *Met*. 13.45.[222] Ulysses' tendency towards deceit and trickery is well established also in the Greek tradition, but the use of such a rare word seems to cast Ulysses as unique in this quality. Scaffai and Green both note that Ulysses' trickery and fraud adopt a legalistic sense in the Roman tradition (*fraudem commonisci*: *Cod. Iust.* 8.35.3; *Dig. Iust*. 42.6.1.5).[223] Given these legal sources date approximately to the 6th century CE, the author of the *Il. Lat.* manages to depict Ulysses' deceit in a rare and innovative manner. Nonetheless, Green concludes that Ulysses' guile is Romanised into a "professional capacity for destruction."[224]

Ulysses' important diplomatic interventions are erased in favour of this less positive portrayal.[225] However, the accusation of deceit is not limited just to Ulysses. The way in which the author critiques the behaviour of individual Greek warriors extends beyond Ulysses and, as noted by Green, provides the foreground for a more negative depiction of the Greeks in general.[226] In the decisive battle between Hector and Achilles, Minerva tricks Hector into believing Deiphobus is nearby and ready to aid him:

> Huic subito ante oculos similis Tritonia fratri
> occurrens iuuenem simulato decipit ore; (*Il. Lat.* 946-947)
> Suddenly before his eyes the Tritonian goddess, in the likeness of his brother, deceived the youth with pretend face.
>
> Dumque retro cedit fraternaque rebus in artis
> respicit auxilia et nullam uidet esse salutem,
> sensit adesse dolos (*Il. Lat.* 967-969)
> And while he falls back, he looks for his brother's aid, a thing of deceit, and he saw no safety there, he senses there to be a trick.

Additionally, at the beginning of the poem, Agamemnon plans to attack the Trojans unaware (*incautum*: *Il. Lat.* 119). The repeated resorting to deceit or unfair tricks (such as

[222] Green 2025: 248.
[223] Scaffai 1982: 315-316; Green 2025: 248.
[224] Green 2025: 249; Verg. *Aen*. 2.43-44; Hor. *Sat*. 2.5; Ov. *Met*. 13.32; Sen. *Tro*. 613-614; Stat. *Ach.* 1.846-847.
[225] Green 2025: 26.
[226] Green 2025: 26.

throwing rocks) overall seem to paint the Greeks as a dishonest and unfair enemy, further reinforcing a deep and unfinished rivalry between the Greeks and the Trojans/Romans. Achilles also demonstrates both bad behaviour and the close relationship between *Il. Lat.* and *Tab. Il. Cap*. In the *Iliad*, Achilles returns directly to the ships after slaying Hector (*Il.* 22.395-404); in both of our sources he is depicted dragging Hector's body three times around the walls of Troy (*Il. Lat*. 996-999).[227]

The author also insinuates Greek cowardice. At one point, Ulysses and Diomedes are sent to scout out Trojan preparations and battle plans (*Il. Lat*. 695-700). The men are described as *pauentes*, or terrified, of the places in the cover of night (*Il. Lat*. 702). This is another invention of the author. In *Iliad* 10.295-298, the men act with the courage of lions and show no fear.[228] Furthermore, throughout the *Il. Lat.*, only Greeks are referred to as *horridus* (*Il. Lat*. 374, 433, 923). Overall, these contrasting depictions of Greek and Trojan heroes seem designed to endear the Trojans to a Roman audience while alienating and denigrating the Greeks. In doing so, the *Ilias Latina* reverses a fundamental orientation of the Homeric model. Whereas the *Iliad* presents the Achaeans from within a Greek cultural perspective and positions the Trojans as the opposing, foreign people, the Latin poem invites its Roman audience to identify instead with the Trojan side. The traditional categories of 'us' and 'them' are consequently inverted. The Trojans become the ancestral people of the Roman reader, while the Greeks are increasingly rendered as the alien aggressors. This reversal further collapses the distance between Trojan and Roman identity, recasting the Trojan War as an ancestral conflict in which Rome's forebears were the victims of Greek aggression and thereby providing an ideological basis for later Roman superiority over Greece. An additional possible function of the *Il. Lat*. perhaps emerges here. For Greek-speaking readers learning Latin, its relatively accessible language and familiar Homeric narrative would have provided an effective point of entry into Latin literature, while simultaneously exposing them to a distinctly Roman reinterpretation of the Trojan War.

[227] Brüning 1894: 164-165.
[228] Kennedy 1998: 63.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* are not two isolated, contemporary responses to the Homeric tradition, but objects engaged in sustained and conscious dialogue with one another. Both participate in the same broader cultural project to transform Greek epic into a distinctly Roman mode of representation, one shaped by the authority of Homer but equally informed by the ideological revisionism of Virgil. The centrality of Aeneas, the reorientation of the Trojan War towards Rome's future, and the privileging of Roman teleology are not unexpected developments within Julio-Claudian representations of myth. Yet, when text and image are examined together, the parallelism of the processes through which these transformations are achieved becomes newly apparent. The intermedial comparison of the *Il. Lat.* and the *Tab. Il. Cap.* consequently reveals that the Romanisation of epic was not confined to content alone but extended to the visual structures through which myth was encountered. Both works reorganise the Homeric tradition through processes of selection, compression, and visual emphasis, directing their audiences towards particular moments and meanings within an expansive narrative tradition. Indeed, these more visual modes of representation are particularly effective vehicles for such cultural transformation. Selection and compression allow an extensive and culturally complex Greek tradition to be reduced, reordered, and made synoptically available, while visual emphasis establishes hierarchies between the material retained and that which is omitted. Romanisation consequently operates through the introduction of explicitly Roman content, but also through the very processes by which the Trojan War is condensed and reorganised for viewing. In the *Il. Lat.*, compressed episodes, carefully arranged narrative progression, and an emphasis upon recognisable scenes reveal a poem that operates according to principles of viewing as much as reading. This observation has significant implications for our understanding of both objects. Studied independently, the *Il. Lat.* has frequently been approached through limited questions of literary status, imitation, and function, while the *Tab. Il. Cap.* has often been interpreted primarily as a visual or decorative object. Such approaches risk obscuring the ways in which both participate in a shared Roman culture of viewing and interpretation.

The visuality of these works also reinforces their shared teleological interpretation of the Trojan War. In the *Il. Lat.*, this can be seen most clearly in the poem's structural components. The acrostics, for example, connect the beginning and end of the work, encouraging the reader to anticipate its conclusion from the beginning of the proem. Such a feature depends upon a mode of engagement that is visual as much as oral – the reader must perceive the arrangement of the text upon the page in order to appreciate its significance. Similarly, the prominence of Aeneas within the *Il. Lat.* and the central placement of Aeneas' narrative trajectory upon the tablet encourage audiences to interpret the Trojan War as the fundamental precursor to Rome's foundation. This same teleological impulse is evident in the poem's adaptation of Achilles' shield. By transforming Homer's ekphrasis, the *Il. Lat.* places Rome at the centre of a cosmological vision. The significance of this transformation is heightened by the traditional interpretation of Achilles' shield as both a microcosm of the world and, in miniature, a key to the concerns of the *Iliad* itself. The *Il. Lat.* preserves this programmatic function while altering its priorities. Its shield likewise condenses the larger poem into a single visual object, but the world it constructs is now organised around concerns that dominate the Latin adaptation: compression, teleology, Trojan continuity, and Rome's future. The shield, therefore, offers not simply a Romanised version of Homeric ekphrasis, but a miniature interpretative key to the *Il. Lat.* as a whole. The circular structure of the shield recalls Homer's original composition, yet the insertion of Mars, Roman destiny, and the imagery of empire reorients this universal image towards Roman interests. Rome is not merely one element within the world represented upon the shield; it becomes the organising principle through which that world is understood. Encircled by the ocean, the Roman future occupies the visual centre of epic history.

This chapter has demonstrated the value of studying these literary and visual representations of myth in conjunction. The relationship between the *Ilias Latina* and the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* is not merely one of shared simplicity or subject matter, but of conscious and deliberate intermedial correspondence. Both works employ comparable strategies to reshape Greek epic for Roman audiences. Reading them together produces new insights into the visual orientation of the *Il. Lat.* The poem's relationship with visual culture is therefore not incidental, but fundamental to the way it constructs meaning.

The following chapter extends this intermedial approach by turning to Statius' *Achilleid* and Pompeiian representations of Achilles on Skyros. Whereas this chapter has explored the visual construction of epic history and Roman destiny, the next will examine the role of the gaze itself: how acts of looking, recognition, and concealment shape the representation and reception of myth across literary and visual media in imperial Rome.

CHAPTER TWO: Achilles on Skyros and the Play of Gazes in Statius' *Achilleid* and Pompeiian Wall Paintings

INTRODUCTION

si nescis, oculi sunt in amore duces. (Prop. 2.15.12)
In case you didn't know, eyes are the leaders in love.[1]

The previous chapter of this thesis established that intermedial analysis is a significant methodology for providing a greatly enhanced understanding of the shared cultural landscape in which text and image operated, not as parallel practices, but in conscious dialogue. This chapter continues to re-evaluate the relationship between literary culture and visual representations of myth in ancient Rome, demonstrating that the Roman practice of reading was deeply embedded within a broader culture of viewing. The overarching aim of this chapter is to use visuality in Rome to explore broader cultural practices and ideologies of *seeing* within Rome, and to demonstrate how these visual paradigms complicate and enrich our understanding of Roman literary texts.

Taking an intermedial approach, I argue that texts such as Statius' *Achilleid* are not only shaped by this culture of viewing but actively reflect it. This culture of viewing should not be seen as peripheral to literary interpretation; rather, it was essential to how media contributed to the transmission of myth, and how genres were constructed, experienced, and understood by Roman audiences. More specifically, I argue that reading and viewing were deeply intertwined activities within Roman culture, and that this entanglement is particularly evident through the theme of the *gaze* – a concept that is applicable across literary and visual media, as well as the domestic spaces where such media were encountered. Through a focused study of Achilles on Skyros wall paintings found in Pompeii, in conjunction with a reading of Statius' *Achilleid*, this chapter explores how Statius engages with and transforms visual traditions. These paintings function as active participants in genre construction and the interpretation of myth. This intermedial dialogue reveals a network of 'intermythic' resonances – that is, connections between different mythic traditions and versions – as well as generic interactions, particularly

[1] Translated by G.P. Goold.

between epic and elegy, which predate Statius' version of the myth and are embedded in the visual culture of the Bay of Naples, where the poet lived and wrote.

Existing scholarship has comprehensively examined the decorative and programmatic functions of mythological wall paintings at Pompeii.[2] Separately, scholars have studied the optical and multifocal qualities of the *Achilleid* (especially in light of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which Federica Bessone called "poetry for the eyes", to which Statius was indebted for the inspiration to create the *Achilleid* as a "feast for the eyes").[3] Little work has been done to bring these spheres of study into direct conversation. This chapter addresses that gap. While I agree that Statius' poetic visuality is shaped by his literary forebears (for example, Ovid), it is also informed by actual visual representations of myth circulating in Roman domestic spaces, particularly in the region of Campania.

This chapter will first provide some introductory discussion on understandings of genre, the myth of Achilles on Skyros, Achilles as a paradigm in 1st century CE Rome, and an introduction to my sources. Following this will be two main sections of analysis. The analysis proceeds outward through successive levels of viewing. It begins with the gazes exchanged between figures within the paintings and the *Achilleid*, before turning to reflective surfaces through which Achilles himself becomes both viewer and viewed. It then considers the wider mythological associations activated by these visual structures, before moving finally to the gaze of the external spectator and the spatial organisation of paintings within the Roman house. This progression from internal gaze to external viewing will show how genre is not merely represented within individual texts or images but produced through acts of looking across media.

[2] Bergmann 1994, 2023; Trimble 2002; Brilliant 1984; Baldassare 1993; Barringer 1994; Cooley and Cooley 2014; Beard 2009; Grahame 2000; Kellum 2020; Leach 2016; Lill 2011; Lorenz 2014; Mattusch 2008; Richardson 1955; Severy-Hoven 2013; Spinelli 2022; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Yegül 2010.
[3] Bessone 2018: 169.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENRE

Genre has provided an important framework through which ancient literature can be organised and interpreted. Ancient texts were shaped by recognisable generic conventions and expectations, although ancient and modern understandings of genre do not necessarily coincide. In 1972, Francis Cairns' influential *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* sought to reconstruct ancient principles of composition through rhetorical categories or 'genres of content', such as the *propemptikon* and *syntaktikon*.[4] Later scholarship increasingly drew upon modern theories of genre and shifted attention towards broader literary categories defined by verse form and subject matter, including epic, elegy, pastoral, and didactic poetry.[5] Stephen Harrison's concept of 'generic enrichment' develops this approach by examining how the conventions associated with such genres can interact within a single work.[6]

However, though genre theory can function as a helpful hermeneutic tool which organises texts into relationships with one another and aids our interpretation of them, the fact that these attempts at classification immediately encounter texts that cannot be nicely contained into a singular generic box also cannot be ignored.[7] By categorising texts in this way, our understanding of genre becomes necessarily prescriptive, and creates an idealised formula to which we expect ancient texts to conform. This understanding is problematic when considering that ancient authors often deliberately challenged ancient conventions of genre, which were contested, hybrid, and ambiguous.[8] This instability is particularly important for this chapter. If generic identity is produced through clusters of recognisable conventions rather than through rigid formal rules, those conventions need not be confined to literary form alone. The following discussion therefore establishes the principal epic and elegiac codes against which the *Achilleid* operates before asking how comparable generic expectations might also be activated through visual representations of Achilles on Skyros.

[4] Braund 2017: 40-41; Cairns 1972.
[5] Fowler 1982; Conte 1994; Harrison 2007: 1-33.
[6] Harrison 2007: 1-33.
[7] Braund 2017: 41.
[8] Miles and Borg 2013: 1; Braund 2017: 41.

Here I set forth some very simplified working definitions of both epic and love elegy. Epic is perhaps the genre that has erroneously been categorised most rigidly. Despite acknowledging the many difficulties in attempting to define epic (or any other genre), Anthony Boyle confirms that criteria such as metre, subject matter, style, length, scope, voice, tone, effect, and function are all relevant to generic classification.[9] He notes the following 'norms' to be expected from Roman epic (referred to be ancient writers as *carmen heroum*): epic must be large-scale narrative poetry centred on heroic action and, more broadly, on the origins, history, or identity of a people; *reges et proelia* (Verg. *Ecl*. 6.3).[10] Epic is described by contemporary authors as *magnum, graue, durum*, and *altum*.[11] Primarily, he states that the main ancient criterion for epic is that it be written in hexameters.[12] From this set of rules, we expect epic to be grand poetry presented in hexameter and covering themes such as national pride, the inclusion of gods and mythic heroes, and the martial achievements of these heroes, as well as a reliable set of *topoi*: councils of the gods, arming scenes, battlefields, the sacking of cities, and funerary contexts and the mourning for the dead. As such, hexameter texts like Virgil's *Aeneid* and Silius Italicus' *Punica* are considered to "marvellously" fulfil the brief of epic genre.[13] To complicate our understanding of genre, however, is the use of epic dactylic hexameters in satire (one of epic's principal literary antagonists), pastoral, and didactic poetry.[14] Importantly, the epics of Hesiod are didactic in nature and emerge not long after Homeric epic. While epic is described in the manner discussed above, pastoral texts are described as *gracile* and *tenue*.[15] Immediately, the main characterising feature of epic fails to distinguish it from other forms of literature. This demonstrates that modern conceptions of ancient genre are too rigid in their criteria and too blunt in their characterisations, failing to allow for more appropriately fluid interpretations of genre.

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[9] Boyle 1993: 2, 15.
[10] Boyle also asserts that Roman epic is from first to last a political genre, with its main subject matter oriented around the establishment of Rome, and her history, values, and destiny. Pre-Virgilian examples include Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*, Ennius' *Annales*, Hostius' *Bellum Histricum*, Furias Antias' *Annales*, Volusius' *Annales*, Cicero's *Marius, De Consulatu Suo*, and *De Temporibus Suis*, Varro Atacinus' *Bellum Sequanicum*, Furius Bibaculus' *Bellum Gallicum*, Cornelius Severus' *Res Romanae*, and the Augustan civil war epics of Gaius Rabirius and Sextilius Ena: Boyle 1993: 2.
[11] Boyle 1993: 4.
[12] Boyle 1993: 4, 14 (fn 13).
[13] Braund 2017: 41.
[14] Gale 2005: 101.
[15] Boyle 1993: 4.

Homeric epic can be seen as the spring from which all other types of literature flowed.[16] Yet epic has also been considered by some as a palimpsestic genre – insofar as much of its significance emerges from the ways in which engages and reworks earlier texts.[17] This intermingling of genre within an 'epic' frame can be seen from the very earliest Graeco-Roman epic. Roman epic sought to act as a pastiche which actively contained constant allusions to earlier texts, architecture, sculpture, and painting – not just at the level of formal or stylistic genre codes, but also their political, social, and moral ideologies.[18] Ennius acts as a prime example of this process, and as a model for Roman epicists: creatively, and extensively using Homer, Hesiod, Callimachus, Livius, and Naevius in his *Annales*, establishing the notion of sub-texts as fundamental to the interpretation of Roman epic. Virgil, of course, became the paradigm of exploiting the semantics of literary allusion in Imperial epic.[19]

Conversely, Latin love elegy is described as book-length collections of poems in the elegiac metre, written mostly in the first person, and recounting the poet's tribulations with his lover.[20] Many of the affairs are fraught and tend to end in tears.[21] The private, the soft (*molle*), and the peaceful often find expression and emphasis within elegy.[22] In elegy, typically clearly delineated gender roles are reversed. The male lover, usually masterful, dominant, and hard, becomes a slave to his female lover, previously the subservient, dependent, and passive object (Prop. 3.11; Tib. 2.3, 2.4, 1.6; Ov. *Am*. 1.11, 2.17).[23] Thus, Roman elegy functioned as a site for complicated negotiations concerning gender, sexuality, and power.[24] Elegy also often contains references to the eyes or to the gaze (Prop. 1.1.1). Quintilian (*Inst.* 10.1.93) lists four authors (Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Gallus) who he formally characterised as elegists.[25] Furthermore, not all extant elegies

[16] Hardie 2005: 89.
[17] Boyle 1993: 1.
[18] Boyle 1993: 2.
[19] Boyle 1993: 1-2.
[20] Gibson 2005: 159.
[21] Gold 2012: 1.
[22] Gibson 2005: 172- 173.
[23] Gold 2012: 3.
[24] Gold 2012: 4.
[25] Gibson 2005: 159.

are about love (for example, Tibullus 1.7; 1.10; 2.1; 2.5).[26] Ovid in particular is known to have flouted these unwritten rules of earlier elegy.[27]

Roy Gibson, nevertheless, stresses that, despite the expanded range that Ovid brought to elegy, it never lost its generic identity or its contradistinction to epic.[28] Yet, this contradistinction between epic and elegy does not seem so clear at all. Though elegists proclaim their work as anti-epic, traces of epic are to be found everywhere within elegy.[29] It is also in Ovid that we can see the especially antagonistic and complex relationship between elegy and epic. At the beginning of his *Amores*, Ovid declares his intention to write military epic. Yet, at this, Cupid laughs and snatches away one foot (*risisse Cupido / dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem*: *Am*. 1.1.3-4), tripping up Ovid and forcing him to limp along in elegiac couplets rather than in epic hexameter, transforming epic into elegy.[30] The generic tension between epic and elegy is therefore inscribed into elegiac metre itself. The elegiac couplet continually juxtaposes the heroic hexameter with the shorter pentameter, formally alternating between the 'large' and the 'small'. Roman elegists consequently exploited within the structure of their verse the same generic opposition between epic grandeur and elegiac reduction that their poetry repeatedly thematised.

Notably, violence is a common trope found in both elegy and heroic epic. A theme often found within elegy is *militia amoris*, or the warfare of love. In this theme, elegy and epic seem to run hand in hand. As summarised by D.F. Kennedy, "if love can be described in terms applicable to war, then war can no less be eroticised."[31] Cupid again seems to best embody this cross-generic argument. Mars is most commonly attributed as Cupid's father, making him the son of Love and War. He uses his bow, an instrument of war, to strike his victims with love. Blurred lines can also be found within the language of both genres. At some points, *uis* must stand for epic fighting, whereas at other times it

[26] Gibson 2005: 170.
[27] Gibson 2005: 171.
[28] Gibson 2005: 172.
[29] Gold 2012: 2; Fredrick 2012: 427.
[30] Kennedy 2012: 199.
[31] Kennedy 2012: 189.

becomes synonymous with rape,[32] making marital and martial wounds consanguineous.[33] Additionally, *arma* signifies not only weapons, but male genitalia too.[34] In the *Tristia*, Ovid claims to Augustus that the author of the *Aeneid* (Virgil) changed arms and the man (*arma uirumque*) into "Carthaginian romps" by introducing Aeneas into the bed of Dido, so turning epic into elegy (*et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor / contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros*: Ov. *Trist*. 2.533-534). Therefore, *arma* belong equally within elegy as they do within epic.[35]

Another problem encountered in the characterisation of genre is the question of how to deal with non-literary sources. Despite the limitations, scholars tend to define genre at the most basic level in terms of metre,[36] yet this convention cannot exist in visual media, and we must search for genre in different ways. Given that Roman genre, and in particular epic, is known for drawing from past architecture, sculpture, and painting to reform the epic form,[37] it is imperative that the study of genre is extended beyond text to other media. Stephen Harrison's *A Companion to Latin Literature* contains Jaś Elsner's essay entitled *Art and Text*. Elsner points out that the very inclusion of this essay within the volume indicates that visual elements are important for the writing of literary Latin.[38] Just as material was often transposed from one genre to another,[39] so the content of visual art was often transmitted into literature. Therefore, the transmission of genre should also be studied across both art and text. Furthermore, material works were often accompanied by some manner of writing (for example, inscriptions) indicating the intertwined nature of art and text. This material/literary form suggests, in Elsner's words, "that genre never wholly forgot its roots in material culture and its relations to the viewing of art."[40] It seems certain, too, that Roman viewers, either consciously or unconsciously, would have

[32] Kennedy 2012: 196-197.
[33] Oliensis 1997: 308.
[34] Adams 1982: 224-225.
[35] Kennedy 2012: 199.
[36] Gold 2012: 1; Boyle 1993: 15.
[37] Boyle 1993: 1.
[38] Elsner 2005: 300.
[39] Miles 2013: 123.
[40] Elsner 2005: 303; Goldhill 1994.

viewed and understood paintings with sets of generic expectations that they also brought to the reading of texts.[41]

Importantly, elegy in particular engaged intensely with themes of visuality and the visual medium to convey its erotic subject matter.[42] As the couplet of Propertius at the opening of this chapter states, vision was an integral part of elegy and the erotic.[43] During the 30s-20s BCE, a new pictorial style emerged in Rome, in which the walls of Roman houses assumed the appearance of fictional art galleries, often with the focal points of the narrative scenes depicting love scenes.[44] Significantly, this development coincided with the flourishing of Roman love elegy in precisely the same decades. The contemporaneous prominence of erotic viewing in poetry and domestic visual culture makes it particularly productive to ask whether similar generic codes were operating across the two media. Many of these scenes tend to focus on mythical lovers.[45] These paintings mark the construction of the elegiac figure as a visual object, and focus is often given to the lovers' interlocked gaze, or onto moments of visual and erotic fascination.[46] Thus, gaze seems to be a useful tool for understanding visual representations of elegy.[47] It has also been established that elegy and epic cannot be so easily defined within literature. Therefore, gaze becomes a helpful tool for understanding visual representations of epic, and subsequently the intertwined nature of these genres in the transmission of myth in Rome.

Ultimately, this chapter brings together literary poetics and Pompeiian visual culture to demonstrate that the *Achilleid* operates as a deeply intermedial text. By analysing the dynamics of gaze, viewing practices, and spatial arrangements in Roman wall painting and houses alongside Statius' text, I will show how genre in Roman culture was not confined to textual literature but was constructed and experienced across media. Reading the paintings and poem together consequently illuminates both the unstable

[41] Miles 2013: 127.
[42] Valladares 2012: 318; Boucher 1965: 41-64; Hubbard 1984; O'Neill 2005; Bowditch 2009.
[43] Valladares 2012: 318.
[44] Valladares 2012: 319; Bergmann 1995: 98-107; Zanker 1988: 265-295.
[45] Ling 1991: 101-135.
[46] Fredrick 2012: 426.
[47] Fredrick 2012: 434.

boundary between epic and elegy and the ways in which Roman audiences encountered myth within a cultural landscape in which texts and images continually informed one another.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MYTH OF "ACHILLES ON SKYROS"

This chapter will discuss the mythic episode of Achilles on Skyros, present in both painted frescoes at Pompeii and in Statius' *Achilleid*. The general premise for the myth (and the one apparent in the *Achilleid*) is thus: Thetis, hoping to circumvent fate and dreading the death of her son Achilles in the Trojan War, removes him from the care of Chiron on Mount Pelion and disguises him as a girl amongst the young daughters of King Lycomedes on Skyros. Achilles remains disguised for a time, during which he impregnates Lycomedes' daughter Deidamia, before Ulysses and Diomedes arrive on the island, discover Achilles' disguise, and take him to the Greek troops at Aulis.

In our earliest sources where Achilles and Skyros are mentioned (The *Iliad*, the *Little Iliad*, and the *Cypria*), Achilles either intentionally or unintentionally lands on Skyros and fathers Pyrrhus/Neoptolemus, but there is no evidence for Achilles' cross-dressing and hiding.[48] The *Iliad* references only Achilles' sack of Skyros (Hom. *Il.* 9.666-668). Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad* indicates that both poems had Achilles unintentionally land on Skyros.[49] In these earliest versions – the *Iliad, Little Iliad* and the *Cypria* – which contained an encounter between Achilles and Deidamia (resulting in the birth of Pyrrhus), there is no evidence of Achilles' transvestism included in the accounts.[50]

Achilles' sojourn on Skyros is not mentioned in Euripides' *Electra* (c. 422-413BCE).[51] However, we are told by the papyrus *hypothesis* (TrGF v.2, 665-666), that Euripides' *Scyrioi* (c. 455-430BCE) covered all the main points which became the standard version of Achilles on Skyros: the intervention of Thetis, and her entrusting of Achilles to

[48] Fantuzzi 2012: 24.
[49] Fantuzzi 2012: 23; Paus. 10.26.4; Verzina 2014: https://chs.harvard.edu/kyklos2-verzina/.
[50] Fantuzzi 2012: 26.
[51] Fantuzzi 2012: 29.

Lycomedes, the transvestism of Achilles, his impregnation of Deidamia, the oracle informing the Greeks that the expedition against Troy could not begin without Achilles, the mission of Ulysses and Diomedes, and Ulysses' final trick to expose Achilles.[52] The *Achilleid* displays many points of contact with Euripides' tragedy; however, differences are apparent. In the *Achilleid*, Deidamia is surrounded by a group of sisters, yet in Euripides' version, Deidamia is motherless and an only child, and her nurse plays a much more central role as the only other female character.[53] The text of the *hypothesis* detailing the plot of the *Scyrioi* has a lacuna at the point where the mission of Ulysses to expose Achilles is introduced. Therefore, we can only speculate few details about what must have been the main tensions and emotions at the heart of Euripides' play.[54]

Euripides' *Scyrioi* seems to have been contemporary with a few works of art which are likely to be the most ancient extant visual depictions of Achilles on Skyros.[55] Firstly, a red-figure kylix attributed to the Oedipus Painter and likely produced toward the end of the first half of the 5th century BCE whose interpretation remains unconfirmed. The kylix depicts on one side three spinners, the middle one seated and two standing on either side (Figure 5):

[52] Fantuzzi 2012: 29-30.
[53] *Hypothesis* 17-18 (Fantuzzi 2012: 3).
[54] Fantuzzi 2012: 30.
[55] Fantuzzi 2012: 35.

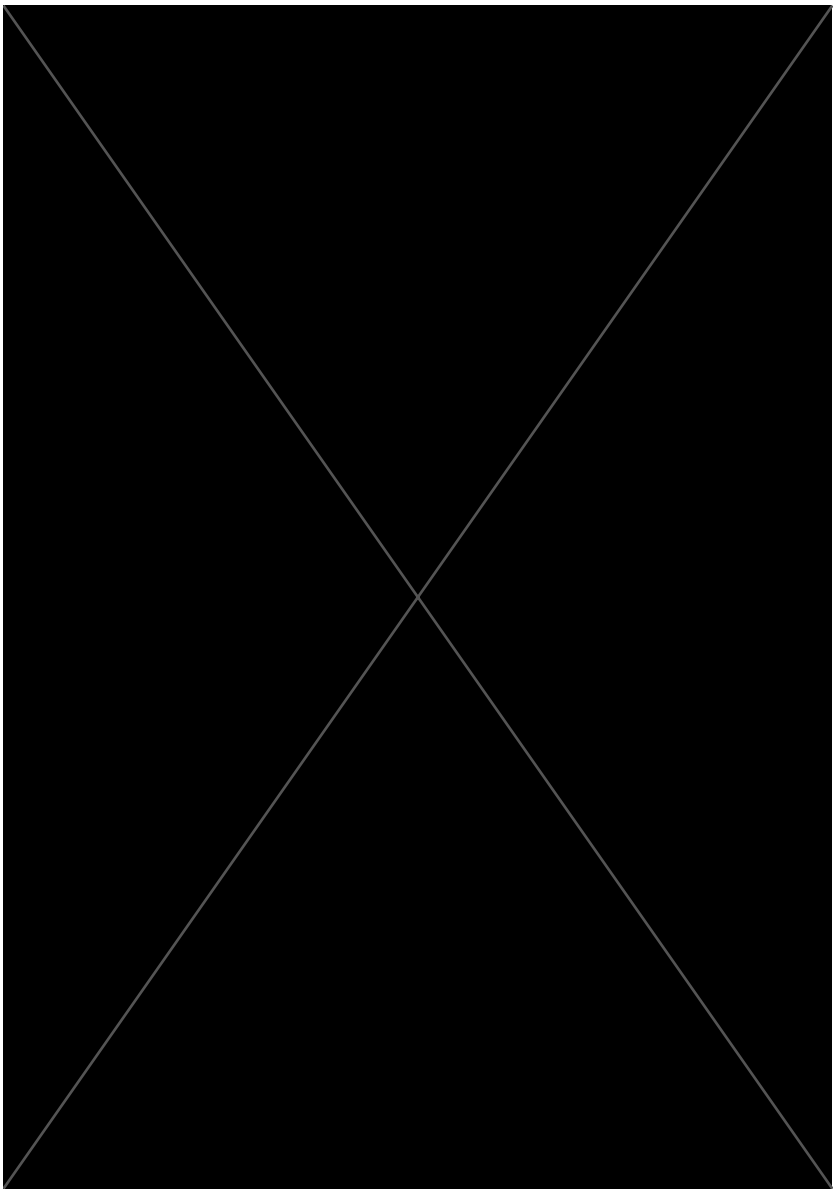


Figure 5: Red-figure kylix attributed to the Oedipus Painter, c.470 BC. a): youth arming with two male companions and b): three women spinning. Private Collection. Reproduced from Fantuzzi 2012: 319, pl. 1.

The group is surrounded by two columns, suggesting the inside of a palace. On the other side of the kylix, also surrounded by columns, is a young man seemingly donning his armour and two men, one on his right, bearded, leading the way with a hand-gesture, and one on his left, extending to him helmet and shield. Young men arming themselves for battle was a popular scene on pottery, and there is no evidence to suggest that this scene specifically depicts Skyros. However, the two men on the second side of the kylix may be interpreted as Ulysses and Diomedes assisting Achilles in their departure for the war. The women on the first side of the kylix may represent the female sphere which Achilles is leaving, but to which he had belonged (the spinning woman seated at the centre of the

other side must then be Deidamia).[56] The uncertainty and look backwards by the central male figure are both features adopted by many later representations of this scene (to be discussed at greater length later) and add credence to this interpretation. Additionally, the reflection in the shield (of what is not entirely clear) and the mirrors surrounding the female figures – both of which are conspicuously and consciously present in later representations – seem to suggest that this may be a scene depicting Skyros.

Second is a Boston volute krater of the mid-5th century BCE by the Niobid Painter (Figure 6):[57]

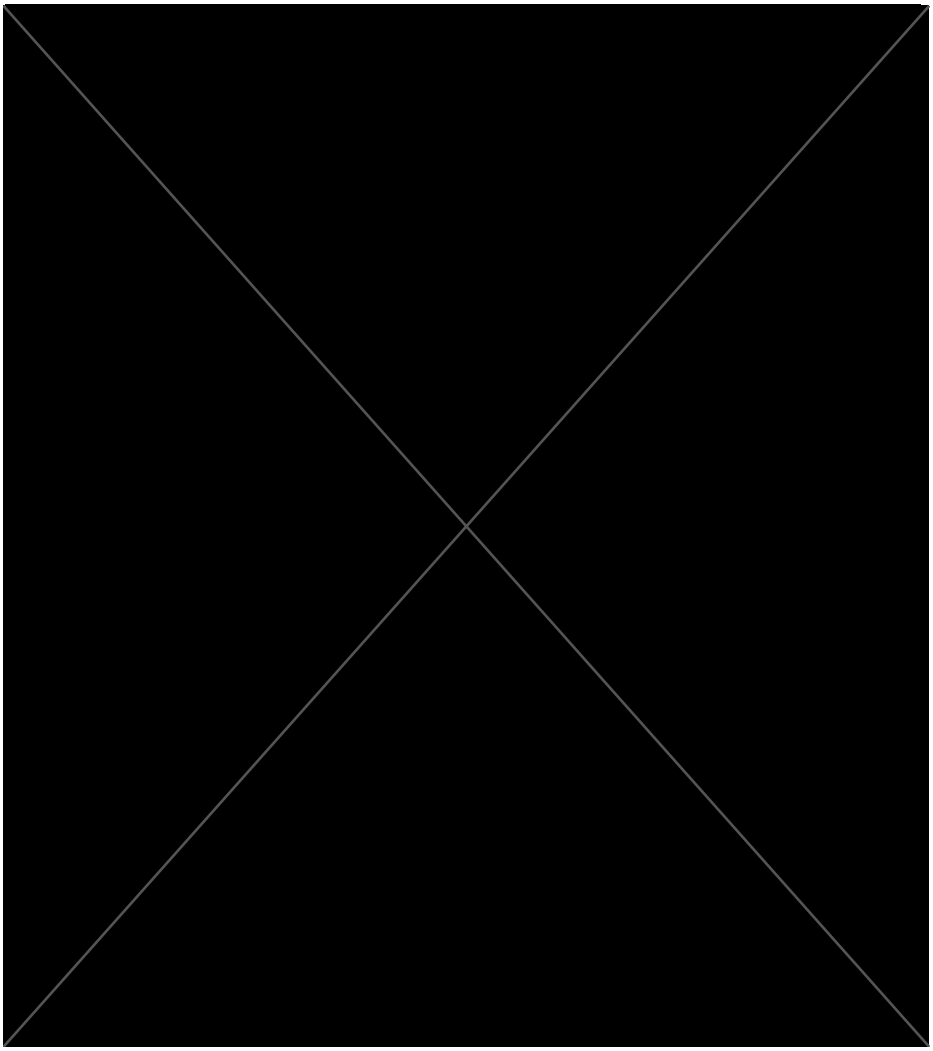


Figure 6: Boston volute krater with warrior's farewell, possibly Achilles departing Skyros. Attributed to the Niobid Painter, mid-5th century BCE. Height (with handles): 68 cm; diameter: 53.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accession no.: 33.56. https://collections.mfa.org/objects/154738/volute-krater-mixing-bowl-with-warriors-farewell-possibl?ctx=4411f95c-4942-4128-88ec-d31ba1ab0a4e&idx=0

[56] Fantuzzi 2012: 35.
[57] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 33.56; LIMC 'Achilleus' 176.

The fragmentary nature of parts of the vase also mean that interpretations of the narrative remain uncertain. The Boston krater depicts on one side the farewell to a soldier leaving for the war. This motif is a common one but, like the kylix, depicts a notably large number of female figures bidding farewell to the young man. Accompanying the women is an old man seated at the end of the processions, and, in the middle of the scene, a youth who holds his spear in one hand while offering the other to one of the five women surrounding him. The woman who holds his hand is also connected to him through their interlocking gaze and also holds his helmet and another spear. On the other side of the krater is another warrior wearing a leather corselet and a Corinthian helmet, who pours a libation from the phiale in his right hand. He is accompanied by other women bidding farewell and holding wreaths. The scene is set on the porch of a building. The first youth has been identified as Achilles departing from Deidamia and her sisters and Lycomedes.[58] Fantuzzi has suggested that the opposite face of the krater is a continuation representing Neoptolemus leaving for Troy with Ulysses and Phoenix, while his mother Deidamia attempts to hold him back. He notes also that the girl in contact with the first male figure wears bridal garments, thus depicting a kind of departure-and-wedding scene consistent with the Statian narrative at *Ach.* 1.885-926.[59] This interpretation would provide a satisfying continuation of the grandfather, father, and grandson (Lycomedes, Achilles, Neoptolemus) surrounded by daughter, wife, and mother (Deidamia). In the first half of the fifth century BCE, paintings of Achilles equipping himself with new arms provided by Thetis and then departing for war from Phthia flourished, yet these appear to stop and are replaced by depictions of Skyros in the 440s BCE, signifying the impact of the *Scyrioi*.[60] Fantuzzi also suggests that the two scenes on this krater may be a representation the two *Scyrioi* of Euripides (on Achilles leaving Skyros for the war) and Sophocles (on Neoptolemus leaving Skyros for the war).[61] He argues, then, that this synchronism seems to suggest a new orthodoxy for the myth established by Euripides, which undermined the traditional setting of Achilles' departure scene (now Skyros, no longer Phthia).[62] An issue

[58] Fantuzzi 2012: 36; Kossatz-Deissmann 1981: 65-66, 1992: 301; Kemp-Lindemann 1975: 58-60; Schefold and Jung 1989: 141.
[59] Also, *Ach.* 1.936-7: *modo te nox una deditque inuiditque mihi:* "One single night has just given you to me and grudged you."; Fantuzzi 2012: 36.
[60] Fantuzzi 2012: 37.
[61] Fantuzzi 2012: 37.
[62] Fantuzzi 2012: 37.

with Fantuzzi's interpretation here is that Deidamia is known to have been an only child in Euripides' *Scyrioi*, while on both artworks she is surrounded by her many sisters. Despite this, the hypothesis that the volute krater depicts Skyros is compelling, given the number of female figures, the aged and seated king, the relationship between the so-called Achilles and Deidamia in the arming scene, and the continuation to the departure of Neoptolemus.

Other early notable artworks depicting Achilles on Skyros, neither of which survive, are the painting of Achilles in the gynaeceum of Skyros by Polygnotus of Athens in the 5th century BCE,[63] and Athenion of Maroneia's painted image of Ulysses discovering Achilles in a maiden's clothing in the 4th-3rd century BCE.[64] This work has often been considered the source for the frescoes found in Pompeii.[65] A dearth of representations, literary or visual, follows these minor instances of literary and iconographic evidence from the 5th-4th centuries BCE. No further narratives of this mythic episode are found until the 1st century BCE – 1st century CE, when the episode reaches the height of its popularity. The story is mentioned briefly by Lycophron in the *Alexandra* and it also appears in the *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidamia* (sometimes attributed to Bion).[66] Both the *Alexandra* and the *Epithalamium* emphasise the unheroic nature of Achilles' stay at Skyros, confirming that his crossdressing must have been present in these later versions. Lycophron derides Achilles' lack of heroic temper, and is pejorative in nature, while Achilles is treated more sympathetically in the *Epithalamium*, which was erotic in nature, admiring Achilles' desire to make love, not war (Bion. *Epith*. 5-32). [67] The Skyros episode is also mentioned in Seneca's *Troades* (Sen. *Tro.* 211-214) as one of the main moments of his father's life recounted by Neoptolemus. Beyond these references, Achilles on Skyros can also be found in Ovid (*Ars Am*. 691-696; *Met*. 13.168-190), Statius (*Achilleid*), Nero's Domus Aurea, and in the houses of Pompeii. Material representations of Achilles on Skyros in the 1st century CE are found surviving most commonly within the houses of Pompeii. From within Pompeii, 12 visual representations of Achilles on Skyros have been

[63] LIMC 'Achilleus' 95; Fantuzzi 2012: 37.
[64] Plin. *HN* 35.134; LIMC 'Ach.' 105.
[65] Fantuzzi 2012: 38.
[66] 1st century BCE, anonymous, sometimes ascribed to Bion of Smyrna; Fantuzzi 2012: 28-29.
[67] Fantuzzi: 2012a: 39-40.

dated to the Flavian era alone. Furthermore, 80% of all of these extant visual representations of Achilles on Skyros depict the very moment Achilles' disguise is revealed by Ulysses.[68]

Perhaps the two most significant examples from Pompeii are found in the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) and the House of Ubonus (IX.5.2), and therefore, I will focus on these in greater detail in this chapter.[69] However, versions are also found in the House of the Vettii (VI.15.2), House of Apollo (VI.7.23), and the House of the Postumii (VIII.4.4).[70] Notably, paired mosaics depicting Achilles on Skyros and the Wrath of Achilles were discovered in the House of Apollo, a neighbouring house to the House of the Dioscuri on the Via di Mercurio. Achilles on Skyros is found in the House of the Vettii on the east wall in the southeast "black triclinium" (triclinium t) within the house's gynaeceum. This painting is fragmentary, with only the lower part remaining extant. A version also once existed in the House of the Postumii on the east wall of Room 10. This version has now faded completely and is no longer visible and survives only through 19th century historical photos and drawings.

ACHILLES AS A PARADIGM IN 1ST CENTURY CE ROME

In the later 1st century CE, there seems to be a marked and deliberate shift from focus on the figure of Aeneas (*Aeneid, Ilias Latina, Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*) to that of Achilles as a cultural and ideological paradigm coinciding with the Flavian reign, suggesting a conscious departure from Julio-Claudian usages of Trojan War mythology. This reorientation is reflected in the art and decoration of domestic spaces in Pompeii, where houses were undergoing, or had very recently undergone, renovations in 79CE – corresponding with Flavian rule. In houses like the House of the Dioscuri, although earlier Republican images associated with Achilles, such as that of Thetis (usually bearing Achilles' armour from Hephaestus) are present, there is a notable absence of depictions of Achilles on Skyros before the Flavian period, indicating the emergence of a new

[68] Heslin 2005: 235-236; LIMC "Achilleus," nos. 105-75; other scenes: nos. 94-104, 176-181. This yields a ratio of 71 representations of the unveiling of Achilles to 17 of everything else on Skyros.
[69] Most significant due to state of preservation, accessibility in the Naples Archaeological Museum. Many others have been lost or heavily damaged.
[70] Dickmann 1998: 513; Sampaolo 1994: 566-567; Caso 2022: 93.

mythological focus to convey cultural interests and concerns. My shifts in focus from Aeneas to Achilles in this chapter reflects this temporal and cultural shift.

Despite the evident popularity of these specific images, they are not often taken seriously within scholarship as a source for the myth's popularity in Rome. Statius is sometimes credited as the originator for the popularity of the Achilles on Skyros myth in Rome,[71] despite the confident dating to the contrary provided by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79CE. Furthermore, despite the remarkable similarities between these paintings and the text of Statius, the two have not been considered in conjunction with one another. Current modern scholarship has typically focussed predominantly on elements of Achilles' transvestism on Skyros and the perceived shamefulness linked to this act. Heslin's *The Transvestite Achilles* (2005) is a leading example. Scholars have also discussed the *Achilleid* in relation to elements of gender and gender performativity,[72] Flavian epic intertextuality, or its links to Homer's *Iliad*.[73] These themes are undoubtedly all present in the wall paintings found in Pompeii, and by studying them in conjunction with the *Achilleid*, we are able to enhance and complicate our understanding of the use of Achilles as a cultural paradigm in 1st century CE Rome.

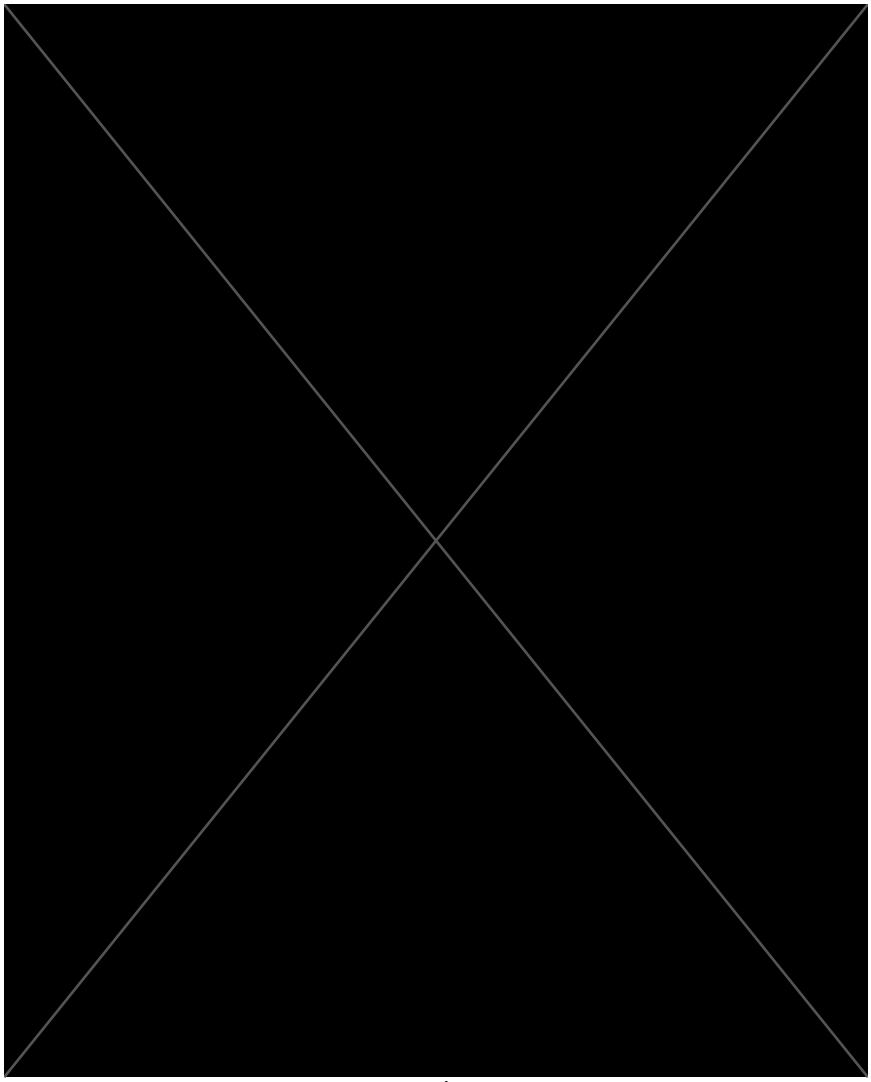
INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES

Throughout this chapter, I will focus on the visual representations of Achilles on Skyros from the House of the Ubonus and the House of the Dioscuri. Both paintings are now housed in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, and I will refer to them by their MANN inv. numbers (inv. 116085 and inv. 9110, respectively) henceforth. In this section I will briefly introduce the paintings and their contexts before going on to analyse them in more depth in the body of this chapter.

[71] Cameron 2009: 3; Bessone 2020: 101.
[72] McAuley 2010; Russell 2014.
[73] Abad Del Vecchio 2019; Feeney 2004; Sfyroeras 2014; Alepidou 2020.

Inv. 116085, House of Ubonus (IX.5.2)

Little is known about the House of Ubonus.[74] The house is located in Regio IX and has received markedly less attention than its wealthier and better-known counterparts in Regio VI. The house occupies the northwest corner of its insula block with a main entrance opening onto the Via di Nola. Its entranceway is flanked by two shops. Room u of the house contains an Achilles theme – with three images dedicated to him: the delivery of Achilles' weapons by Thetis, Achilles on Skyros (inv. 116085; 148.6cm x 156.5cm; north wall, central section) (Figure 7), and Thetis in Hephaestus' workshop.



gure : c es on yros , century .
Room u, north wall, House of IX.5.2 (House of Ubonus), Pompeii. Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 116085. Image via Wikimedia Commons, public domain: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IX.5.2_Pompeii._Room_20,_north_wall_with_painting_of_Achilles_discovered_in_Skyros._Now_in_the_Naples_Archaeological_Museum._Inventory_number_116085..jpg

[74] Also known as the House of the Skeleton, House of Achilles, or the House of Stronnius.

The other two images remain *in situ* (Figure 8). Room u opened onto the peristyle near the rear of the house as well as onto the south end of the tablinum. This room also seems to have undergone recent renovations when compared with the rest of the house,[75] suggesting a resurgence of interest in this myth of Achilles at this time.

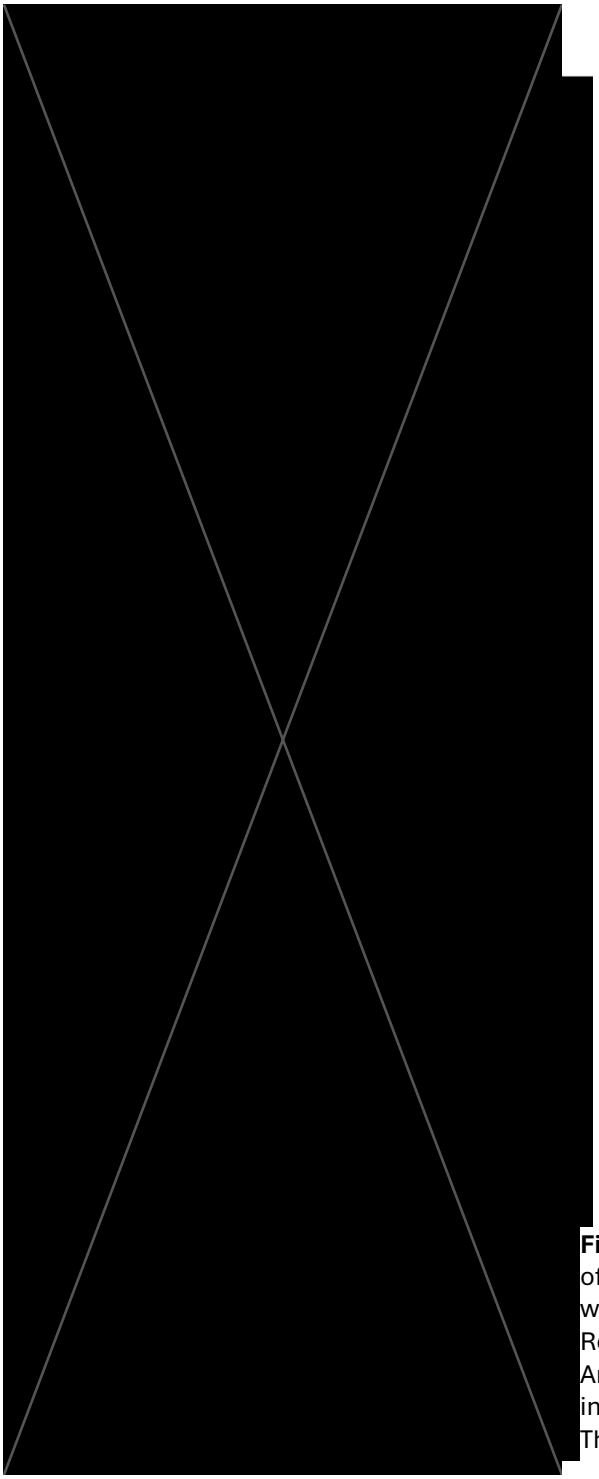


Figure 8: Achilles cycle from room u, House IX.5.2 (House of Ubonus), Pompeii, first century CE. Frescoes. (A) Left wall: Thetis carrying the arms of Achilles*, in situ*. (B) Rear/north wall: Achilles discovered on Skyros, Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 116085. (C) Right wall: Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus*, in situ*. Reproduced from Thompson 1960-61: 36-77, fig. 1A-C.

[75] Bragantini 1999: 370.

In the main Achilles on Skyros fresco (inv. 116085) (Figure 7), several moments play out simultaneously: Ulysses' trap has been sprung – in the upper left-hand corner a war trumpet is blown, and Achilles, in the centre of the image, shocked by the sight of the weapons springs forward towards them, his dress falling from his shoulders to reveal his true identity. He has pale skin to match the female figures in the scene, and he grasps in his right-hand a sword. He reaches down towards a shield with his left. Achilles is defined by his movement across the scene from left (symbolising Skyros) to the right (Troy) – his left leg is bent and tilted towards the right, with his right arm in sync with the leg. Notably, his head is turned back towards the left, to lock eyes with Deidamia. He is grasped by Diomedes and Ulysses on both sides – in a formulaic gesture for a male abduction or rape.[76] A throng of figures surround him, creating a scene of panic and disorder. Ulysses has a sword in his left hand and grabs Achilles' forearm with his right. Diomedes stands behind Achilles on the left, his body mostly concealed. His right arm is reaching across Achilles, and he looks directly at him. We see the naked backside of Deidamia on the far left-hand side of the image. Her body is tilted to the left to escape the danger, but looks to the right, making eye contact with Achilles.

Standing directly behind Achilles is King Lycomedes: he stands completely unmoving – a deceived and passive figure – and stares towards Ulysses. He is very much in the background of both the narrative and image. Lycomedes is surrounded by the group of soldiers. Other surrounding figures include the trumpeter in the upper left-hand corner (Agyrtes),[77] three accompanying soldiers with shields encircling Lycomedes, Deidamia's nurse (to the left of Diomedes), and another daughter of Lycomedes behind Ulysses. The nurse shelters Deidamia from the men in the centre of the image and directly faces her – there seems to be a specific connection or moment between them that we, the audience, may not be privy to (this perhaps links to the prominent role she was likely given in Euripides' *Scyrioi*). She looks at Deidamia, who seems in that moment to be looking at

[76] "Rape of the Leucippides", Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 420-410 BCE, attributed to the Meidias Painter, British Museum, London, inv. E224; "Theseus Pursuing Helen", Attic red-figure bell krater, ca. 460-450 BCE, attributed to the Niobid Painter, Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, inv. 69.31.1; "Abduction of Helen by Theseus", Attic red-figure stamnos, late fifth century BCE, attributed to Polygnotos, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. 18063. See Bergmann 2023: 188. For further examples, see Cohen 2007.

[77] Stat. *Ach*. 1.724.

Achilles instead. It is evident that she knows something that the others don't – likely that the existence of Achilles' and Deidamia's son will now need to be revealed to the men. Deidamia's sister to the right cowers behind Ulysses in a pose that mimics that of Deidamia.

At the feet of Achilles lies a shield, on which is a reflection of a youthful Achilles accompanied by his tutor Chiron. This reflection is present across representations in Pompeii, and the image reflects another fresco found in Herculaneum (MANN inv. 9109) (Figure 9). The schema is known also from a marble statue group from the Saepta Julia in Rome (Plin. *HN* 36.29), which was established by Agrippa in 26BCE.[78] As Achilles reaches for the shield, his hand points directly to the Chiron image at the centre of the shield.

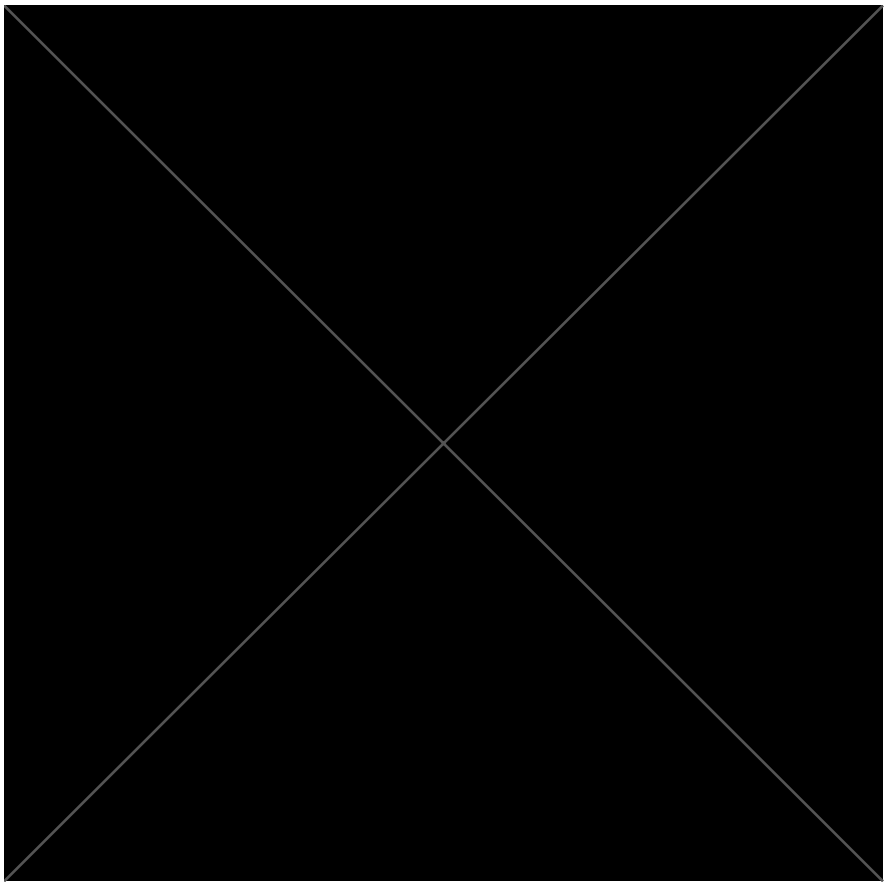


Figure 9: "Chiron Teaching Achilles to Play the Lyre", first century CE. Fresco, Herculaneum. Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 9109. Image via Wikimedia Commons, public domain: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Achilleus_Lyra.jpg

[78] Zanker 1988: 142; Bergmann 2023: 188.

Furthermore, as Diomedes grasps Achilles' arm, his own arm parallels the embrace of Chiron visible on the shield.[79]

Inv. 9110, House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6)

The House of the Dioscuri was excavated in 1828-1829. Situated northwest of the Forum and occupying the entire southern end of Insula IX, the house is considered one of the grandest and most richly decorated houses in Pompeii.[80] Located just one block from the Terme del Foro and two from the forum, the Via di Mercurio was prime Pompeiian real estate, and had been one of the wealthiest streets since Samnite times.[81] The house was named for the paired Dioscuri paintings,[82] one on each wall of the *fauces* at the entrance to the house (Figure 10):

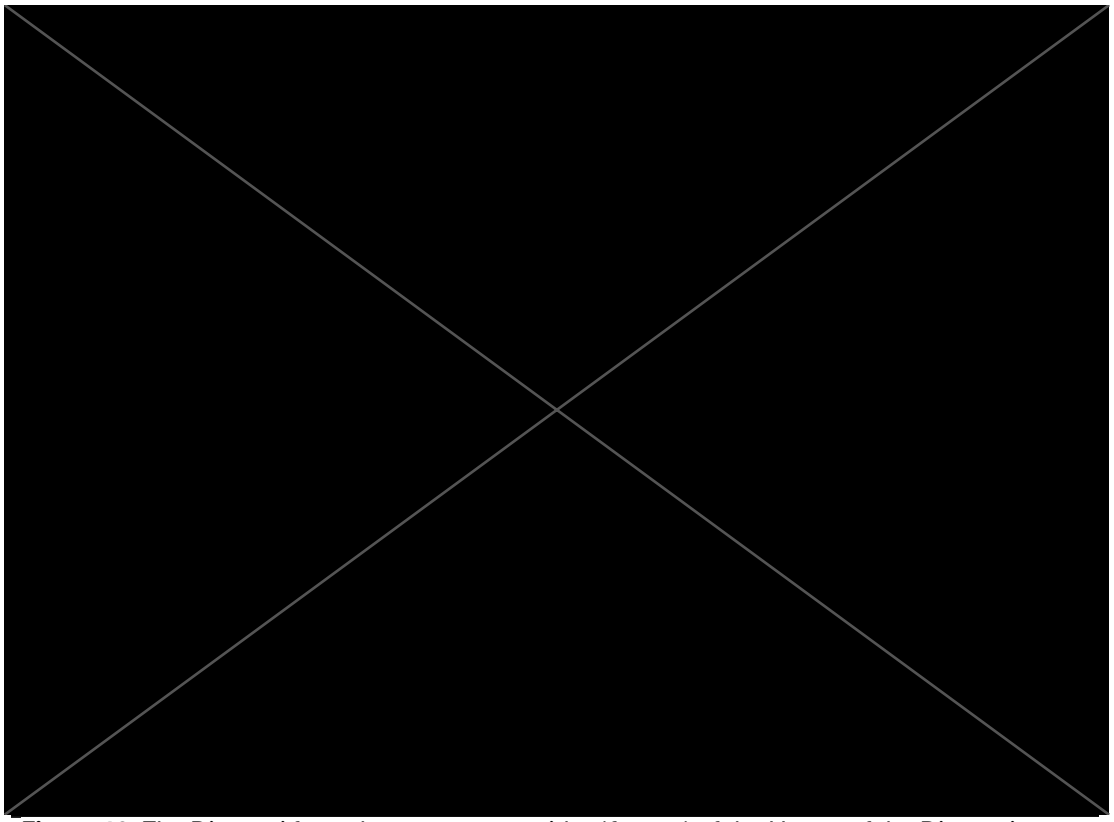


Figure 10: The Dioscuri from the entrance corridor (*fauces*) of the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6), Pompeii. Frescoes. Left: one of the Dioscuri with horse, from the north wall, MANN, inv. 9455. Photograph by Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0. Right: one of the Dioscuri with horse, from the south wall, Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 9453. Photograph by Jean-Pol Grandmont, CC BY 2.5. Composite by author; Images via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dioscuro_(9455)_001.jpg and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Dioscuro_(9453)

[79] Trimble 2002: 234.
[80] Trimble 2002: 226-228; Richardson 1955: vii-1.
[81] Richardson 1955: 1-2.
[82] Attributed inventively to the Dioscuri Painter: Richardson 1955: 116.

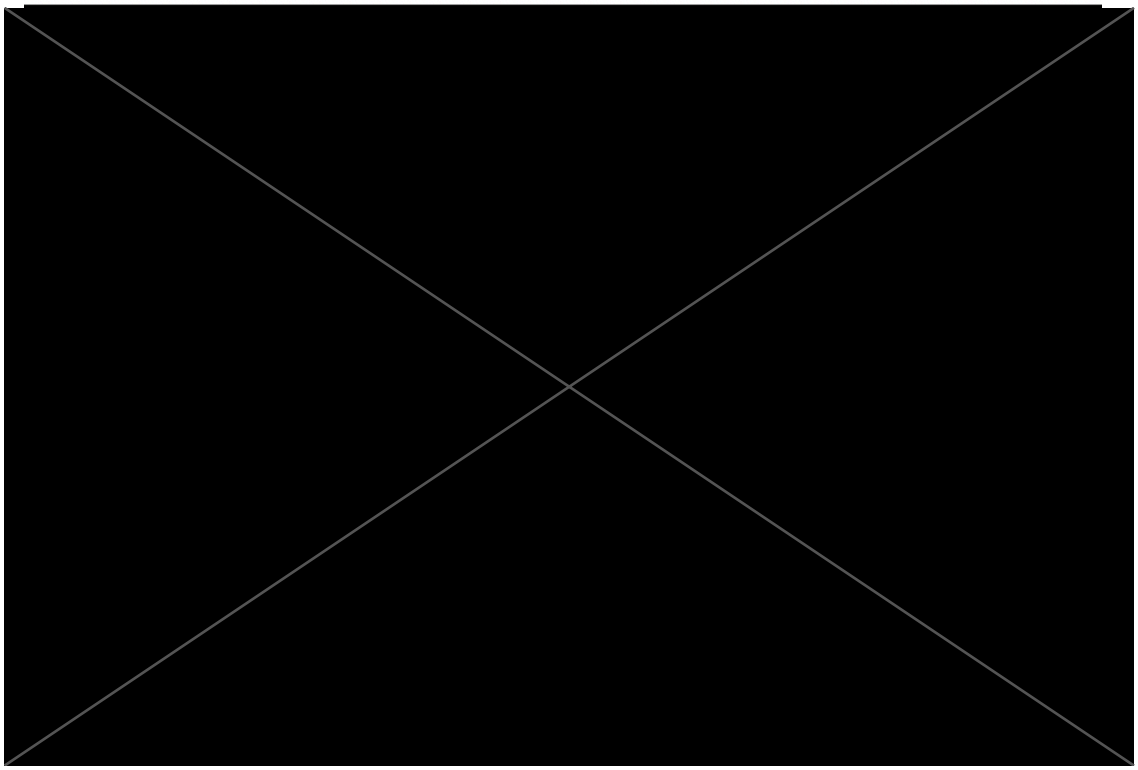


Figure 11: Plan of the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7), Pompeii. Reproduced from Miller 2020: 35, fig. 1; modified from Trimble 2002: 227.

After passing through the entry hall, the space opens up into a Corinthian-style atrium (one of only four found at Pompeii).[83] To follow the main axis of the house (Figure 11), the atrium then leads directly into the tablinum, directly opposite the entry hall, where there were two paintings of Achilles – one depicting Achilles on Skyros (inv. 116085; 98.7cm x 148cm) (Figure 12),[84] and the other the Wrath of Achilles (Figure 13).[85]

[83] Richardson 1955: 8.
[84] Now situated in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, with the corresponding inventory number.
[85] Trimble 2002: 228.

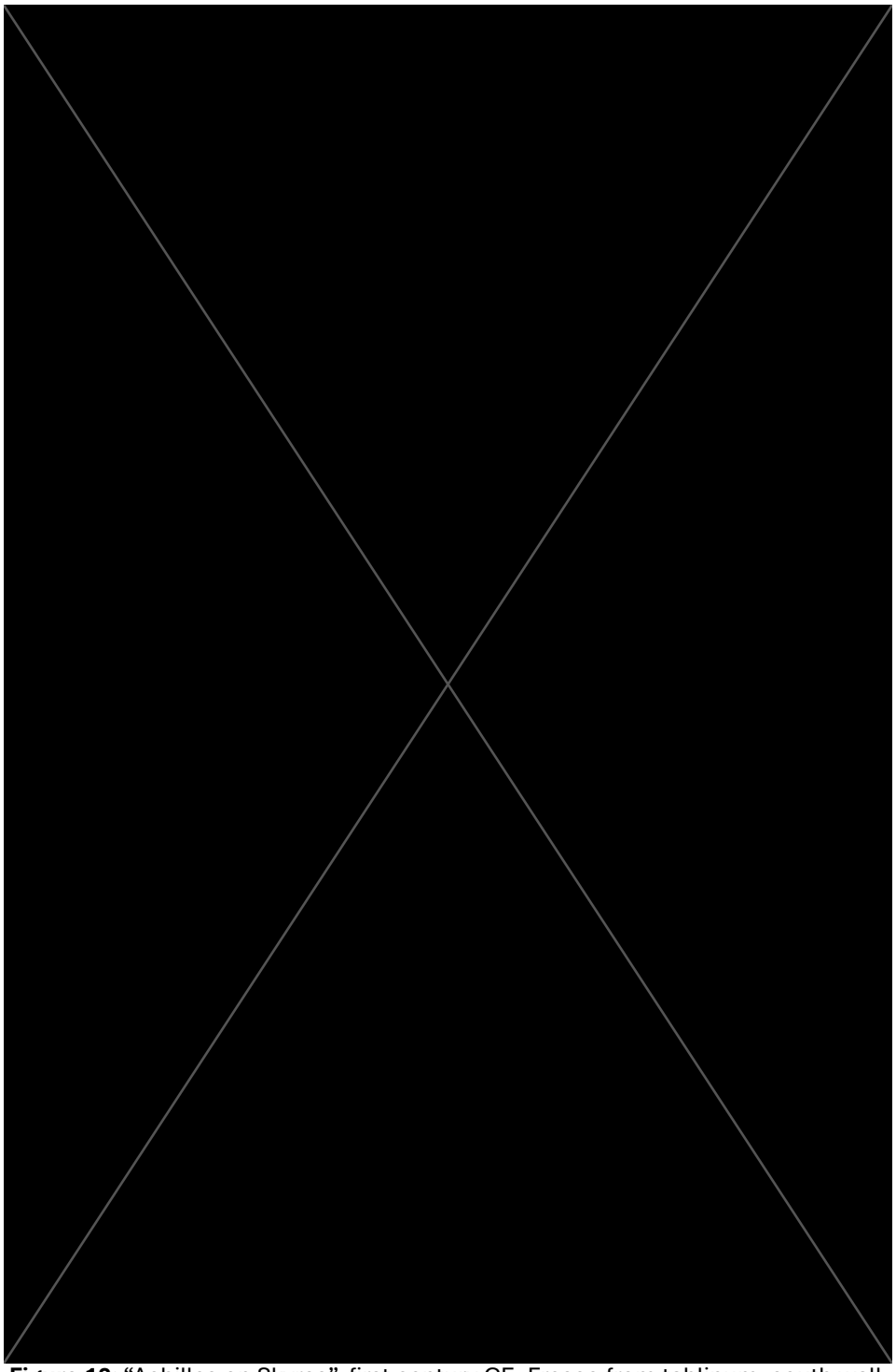
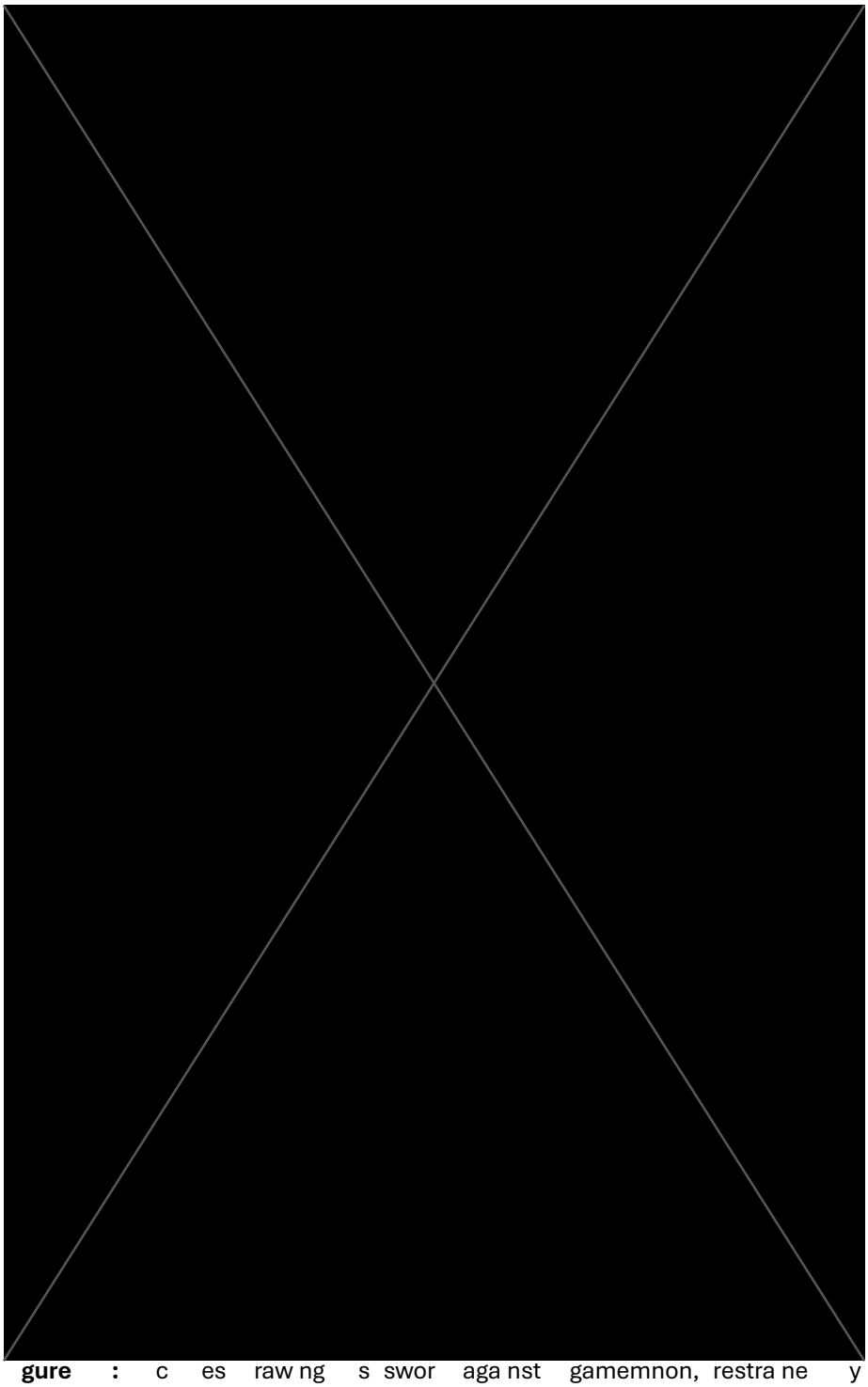


Figure 12: "Achilles on Skyros", first century CE. Fresco from tablinum, south wall, central panel, House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7), Pompeii. Naples Archaeological Museum, inv, 9110. Photograph by 'Chappsnet', CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fresco_depicting_the_discovery_of_Achilles_on_Skyros.jpg



gure : c es raw ng s swor aga nst gamemnon, restra ne y Athena, 1st century CE. Fresco, from tablinum north wall, House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7), Pompeii. Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 9104. Photograph by 'ArchaiOptix', CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/25/Wall_painting_-_Achilles_restrained_by_Athena_-_Pompeii_%28VI_9_6-7%29_-_Napoli_MAN_9104.jpg?utm_source=commons.wikimedia.org&utm_campaign=index&utm_content=original

The two Achilles' paintings in the House of the Dioscuri were completed by the "Achilles Painter", who completed a total of seven discovered works in the House of the Dioscuri, the Casa del Citarista, and the Casa di Marco Lucrezio – some of the largest and most beautiful first-rate paintings in Pompeii.[86] The two paired paintings of Achilles perfectly echo the juxtaposition of the two Dioscuri on either side of the entryway. The atrium also contains a Republican era painting of Thetis bringing the arms of Achilles.[87]

This tablinum, which had undergone renovation in the years prior to the eruption,[88] was the most richly painted room of the house. It also lies in the centre of a major sequence of rooms in the house, positioned between the atrium and the peristyle. Thus, it marks the point of transition between the most public rooms at the front of the house and the more private rear of the house, associated with pursuits of *otium*.[89] The morning reception (or daily *salutatio*) took place in a house's tablinum, when the *patronus* would receive his clients, who assembled in the atrium (Vit. *De Arch*. 6.5.1). This is one of the most powerful and enduring images associated with the Roman house.[90] As such, the decoration of this room must have been concerned with the public self-presentation of the owner. Based on the discovery of a seal within the house (*CIL* X 8058.I3) and several electoral programmata of the façade of the house (*CIL* IV I75), (*CIL* IV I174), (*CIL* IV I76), (*CIL* IV 2I5), (*CIL* IV 2I6),[91] the owners of the House of the Dioscuri are able to be named as N. Nigidius Fuscus, his son M. Nigidius Vaccula, and a possible employee of the family Cn. Caetronius Eutychus. Based on the late annexation of the adjoining Domus Caetroni, it seems that father and son were connected in business, but upon the son's marriage, he relocated to the Domus Caetroni, attached to the main house by a back corridor.[92]

The Achilles on Skyros painting in the House of the Dioscuri (inv. 9110) (Figure 12) is virtually identical to that in the House of Ubonus (inv. 116085). This version has been completed by a more skilled artist, though some of the figures are less well-preserved,

[86] Richardson 1955: 139.
[87] Richardson 1955: 29.
[88] Richardson 1955: 32.
[89] Trimble 2002: 242.
[90] Wallace-Hadrill 1988; Grahame 1998: 173.
[91] Richardson 1955: 81-82.
[92] For an extensive breakdown of this family and their careers, see Richardson 1955: 81-87.

and the left-hand side of the image is no longer completely extant. Similarly to inv. 116085, Achilles is the central figure in the scene. His complexion is noticeably pale when contrasted with Ulysses and Diomedes, and his dress falls from one shoulder to reveal his masculine identity. Like in the previous scene, his left leg is bent towards the right, with the left arm reaching forward in the same direction, grasping a too-small sword. His head is turned towards the left, looking in the opposite direction to the one his body moves. The shield, reflecting the youth of Achilles with Chiron, sits just behind Achilles' leg, and he seems to reach for it with his free hand.

This Ulysses' stance is more aggressive than in inv. 116085, and he looks up, into the face of Achilles. He holds a spear, rather than a sword, in his left hand, but grasps Achilles' forearm with his right. His spear points directly at the image of the shield in this version, directing the viewers' eyes to the reflected image.[93] Diomedes is almost iconographically identical to the previous version of the scene, although his and Ulysses' tanned skin are a much more noticeable feature of this image. The figure of Deidamia is missing from the scene, though we can tell from inv. 9110 and Achilles' glance backwards that she must have taken up the space on the far left-hand side of the painting. Lycomedes is directly behind Achilles, but is barely visible, due to degradation of the painting. He seems likely to be an almost identical figure to that Lycomedes in inv. 116085.

Less attention is given to background figures in this version of the scene. Deidamia's sister remains present, though her pose is altered, and there are fewer visible soldiers present. We cannot see the trumpeter, but this seems more likely due to the damage to the painting. This simplification of visible background figures suggests a greater level of focus given to the figures in the central foreground. Furthermore, additional items can be seen on the floor in the foreground of this image. Among these items seems to be a helmet, a mirror (left), and a greave (uncertain). Achilles seems to have dropped the mirror in favour of the weaponry.

[93] Trimble 2002: 234.

In both the House of the Dioscuri and the House of Ubonus, both rooms containing images of Achilles on Skyros seem to have been very recently renovated, indicating that:
a) there were trends to be followed in terms of mythological domestic décor, and,
b) that both of the owners, at differing positions of the wealth spectrum, were eager to remain up to date with these trends.

ACHILLEID

Written in c. 94-96CE,[94] Statius' *Achilleid* is typically considered to be an 'incomplete' epic poem, consisting of one and a half books, or 1,127 dactylic hexameters. This dating places the *Achilleid* within the period of the 1st century CE in which there was a concentration of Latinised Greek epic.[95] Statius' self-declared intent in composing the *Achilleid*, as he sets out the in proem, was to dedicate the work to the entire life of Achilles, from birth through to death:

> nos ire per omnem
> (sic amor est) heroa uelis Scyroque latentem
> Dulichia proferre tuba nec in Hectore tracto
> sistere, sed tota iuuenem deducere Troia. (*Ach*. 1.4-7)
> Be it your pleasure that I (so I crave) traverse the whole hero, bringing him forth by Dulichian trump as he hides in Scyros, nor stopping at Hector's drag, but singing the warrior through Troy's whole story.[96]

The text is considered largely unfinished, with the extant work covering Achilles' childhood at Mount Pelion with Chiron, his relocation to Skyros at the behest of his mother, his fathering of a son with Deidamia, his discovery by Ulysses and Diomedes, and his departure from Skyros for the Trojan War. Prominent themes throughout the text include the issues of cunning and deceit, sexual passion, effeminacy and transvestism, and heroism.[97] The longest narrative in the extant part of the *Achilleid* is dedicated to the Achilles on Skyros episode – in which Achilles' ruse is uncovered by Ulysses.[98]

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[94] Throughout the *Siluae* (composed 89-96CE), Statius refers to recitations of the *Achilleid* (*Silv*. 5.2.162; 5.36). The *Siluae* also references the life of Achilles, with themes that are similar to those covered in the *Achilleid* (*Silv*. 1.2.216; 2.1.88; 2.6.30; 2.6.54; 5.3.193). Furthermore, Statius himself bemoans that he is struggling with writer's block in the spring/summer of 95CE (*Silv*. 4.4.93f): Dilke 1954: 6.
[95] For example, the *Ilias Latina,* Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, and Statius' *Thebaid*.
[96] For the *Achilleid*, the Loeb edition is used; translations of this text are by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, unless otherwise specified.
[97] Alepidou 2020; Bessone 2020; Heslin 2005; Kozák 2014; Kozák 2019; McAuley 2010; McNelis 2020; Moul 2012; Russell 2014; Sanna 2007.
[98] Fantuzzi 2013: 151.

Like the author of the *Ilias Latina*, Statius clearly seems to have harboured more ambitious intentions than to simply translate pre-existing Greek works into Latin. Until 2005 and the publication of Heslin's *The Transvestite Achilles*, Statius had been characterised as merely a "slavish imitator",[99] yet, Statius' aim – to cover the entirety of Achilles' life, rather than focus solely on his *aristeia* at Troy – was a scope that clearly progressed beyond the scope of Achilles' life contained within Homer's *Iliad*.[100]

As a Neapolitan, raised in Naples and Rome by a professional Greek poet and *grammaticus*, Statius was tied closely to both Italy and Greece,[101] giving him ideal links to Trojan War mythology and its meaning in Rome. Indeed, he is referred to as a poet with a *tria corda*: Greek, Roman, and Neapolitan.[102] Campania is often regarded as "the gateway for Greek culture in Italy": a site of dispute in the second Punic war, the primary zone for expansion for Roman *otium* and withdrawal, a region of celebrated fecundity and prosperity (*Campania felix*), the place to go for Sibylline prophecy or *katabasis*, as well as a stopping place for Aeneas enroute to Italy.[103] Above all, the Bay of Naples was the region most closely associated with elite Roman leisure.[104] Tacitus referred to Naples as *quasi Graecem urbem* ("an almost Greek city": Tac. *Ann* 15.33.2), and its Greek characterisation was what made the city a cultural capital. Statius himself also described Naples as a representation of "the union of Roman dignity with Greek creative freedom" (*Romanus honos et Graia licentia*: *Silv*. 3.5.94).[105]

Statius was heavily influenced by his father's ability to move easily between the two cultural worlds and thus exemplified the significance of knowledge of Greek and Latin literature in the construction and maintenance of the Roman elite.[106] Accordingly, Statius can be positioned at the centre of this Graeco-Roman cultural interchange.[107] However,

[99] Heslin 2005: 93.
[100] Augoustakis 2016: 197.
[101] Newlands 2012: 1-2; Bessone 2014: 219.
[102] Bessone 2014: 223; Gell. 17.17.1 (re: Quintus Ennius); Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 3
[103] Ker 2009: 344.
[104] Newlands 2012: 137; Lomas 1997: 37-38; Connors 2000: 499.
[105] Newlands 2012: 140.
[106] Newlands 2012: 5.
[107] Newlands 2012: 140; Hulls 2014: 193.

cultural anxiety also surrounded the region of Campania. Within the Republic, Campania was known as a place of civilised withdrawal, as well as a representation of values considered to be detrimental to the success of the Republic. Rome likewise possessed a long tradition of disparaging Greece through stereotypes of luxuriousness, *mollitia*, effeminacy, and moral or cultural excess.[108] Such discourse remained readily available into the imperial period, with examples like Umbricius' tirade against the Greeks in Juvenal (Juv. 3.58-125). At the same time, however, aspects of Greek culture, such as *paideia*, acquired increasingly positive significance within Roman elite identity. Statius actively participated in this negotiation of Greek cultural identity by challenging Hellenising stereotypes through his promotion of positive aspects of Hellenism, such as education (*paideia*), and excellence in athletics, arts, music, and literature (*Silv*. 2.2.6-8; 3.5.92; 5.3).[109]

Statius' *Achilleid* is also significant for its substantial engagement with contemporary material culture in Rome. This is most notable in Statius' focus on the Achilles on Skyros episode – in which Achilles' disguise is uncovered by Ulysses, and he is momentarily suspended between his feminine disguise and his masculine identity. Scholars have previously either misunderstood or understated the importance of visual depictions of this myth, ascribing too much innovative credit to literary articulations of mythic retellings.

> "The very fact that he [Statius] got no further may have contributed (in the West at least) to the growing concentration of interest in this part of the cycle."[110]

Here, Cameron asserts that Statius' focus on this mythic episode in the *Achilleid* was the reason that it was of such great interest in later Western scholarship, dismissing the fact that the episode was already prolific in the Bay of Naples prior to Statius' treatment of it. Bessone also asserts that Statius, by integrating the Skyros myth into the *Achilleid*, "transformed epic traditions, reinterpreting even Homer and the *Iliad* in line with erotic-

[108] In some of his letters, Cicero refers to the Greeks as untrustworthy, false, jealous (Cic. *Quinct*. 1.1), deceitful, bitter, fickle, and obsequious (Cic. *Quinct*. 1.2).
[109] Newlands 2012: 6.
[110] Cameron 2009: 3.

elegiac poetry."[111] This also omits any significant impact made by the pre-existing presence of this myth in art and material culture. Statius' choice to integrate the Skyros myth into literary epic does, however, reinforce the profound impact and presence this particular myth had at the time, and is a case study of the active dialogue between material and literary culture. Just as the *Ilias Latina* functions as an expanded ekphrasis for the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*, so Statius' *Achilleid* functions as an expanded ekphrasis for the visual representations of Achilles on Skyros found at Pompeii. The study of the *Achilleid* in conjunction with these visual representations provides a literary link to the social and cultural values expressed in the houses of Pompeii.[112]

ACHILLES ON SKYROS AND THE PLAY OF GAZES

The Roman "elegisation" of epic has already received scholarly attention in recent years.[113] Scholars have recognised that Statius' portrayal of Achilles disrupts epic norms: the greatest of Greek heroes is shown not in battle, but at a moment of profound vulnerability and erotic exposure, cross-dressed and hidden among the young daughters of Lycomedes. The *Achilleid* thereby reconfigures the expected arc of the epic hero into a narrative of desire, delay, and gender instability – all tropes of the elegiac genre.[114] Yet while modern scholars have discussed the elegiac nature of Statius' work, visual culture has remained underexplored in this discussion. In his *De Lingua Latina*, Varro describes sight as the "strongest of the five senses" (Varro*, Ling* 6.80). Martin Jay applies to this claim the theoretical perspective of "phallogocularcentrism" – the connection between the phallus, representation, and the eye.[115] This idea of an inherent link between sight, or gaze, and the erotic encourages an intermedial viewing in order to understand the textual genre-bending that occurs within the *Achilleid*. Although genre is often understood within a textual form, visual representations can draw upon multiple generic and erotic codes simultaneously. The presence of elegiac or erotic visual codes in images of Achilles' disguise forces us to re-read the *Achilleid* as a text negotiating its own generic hybridity. Though Statius' genre-bending within the *Achilleid* has been widely recognised, it has not

[111] Bessone 2020: 101.
[112] Newlands 2012: 2.
[113] Miles and Borg 2013; Gibson 2005; Gold 2012; Kennedy 2012; Oliensis 1997; Fredrick 2012.
[114] Gold 2012: 4.
[115] Jay 1993: 493-542; Fredrick 2002: 2.

been considered alongside visual representations whose greater generic fluidity can illuminate the poem's own movement between epic and erotic modes.

I argue here that wall paintings from Pompeii, particularly those depicting Achilles on Skyros (House of the Dioscuri, inv. 9110 and House of Ubonus, inv. 116085), significantly corroborate and intensify the elegiac themes found in the *Achilleid*. These images offer evidence that the Roman reception of Achilles' story was already exploring the boundaries between elegy and epic before Statius' poem, and they reveal that the negotiation between epic and elegy extended beyond elite literature into the sphere of domestic, popular, and emotional life. Furthermore, themes of visuality and gaze shared by both media demonstrate the complicated and allusive nature of mythic transmission within an intermedial cultural environment.

Even before Roman adaptations, the episode centres on a rupture of traditional epic values: Achilles, the epitome of martial masculinity, conceals his identity among young women, succumbs to erotic temptation, and is ultimately discovered in a scene charged with performative gender ambiguity. This moment alone carries an elegiac charge, softening heroic grandeur into personal vulnerability, seduction, and emotional exposure. Statius' *Achilleid* exploits this tension by highlighting Achilles' physical beauty, his self-conscious performance of femininity, his yielding to erotic temptation, and his ambivalence toward the martial destiny that awaits him. Achilles becomes, in effect, a figure at war between two literary traditions: epic hero and elegiac lover.

Within Statius' address to Domitian at the beginning of the poem, we can see this battle between the elegiac and epic traits alluded to:

> At tu, quem longe primum stupet Itala uirtus
> Graiaque, cui geminae florent uatumque ducumque
> certatim laurus (olim dolet altera uinci) (*Ach.* 1. 14-16)
> But you, the wonder of Italy's and Greece's manhood first by far, for whom the twin laurels of bards and captains flourish in rivalry (one of the twain is long since sad to be surpassed.

Like Domitian, Achilles is characterised by Statius as a figure split between the arts, poetry, love (all falling under the blanket of elegy) and his martial, epic, heroic other self.

This sense of warring halves is conveyed from Domitian to Achilles himself within the poem. Achilles switches between the first person (*scio: Ach*. 1.636) and addressing himself in the second person (*Ach*. 1.625), with this shifting creating a sense of a split self.[116]

The wall paintings from Pompeii enhance and complicate these literary developments. Their structure and viewer-oriented dynamics powerfully intensify the elegiac potential of the Skyros myth, demonstrating that generic play between epic and elegy extended beyond literary production into Roman visual and domestic culture. In addition, the paintings activate mythic allusions across the broader Roman imagination, evoking figures such as the mad Ulysses, the love-struck Aeneas in Carthage, the doomed gaze of Orpheus at Eurydice, and Menelaus' paralysis at the sight of Helen – all moments where eroticism or love complicates and disrupts heroic teleology. Visual pairing (especially in domestic contexts) can introduce interconnected genre into the visual space. For example, if an Achilles on Skyros image is paired with a quarrelling Achilles and Agamemnon scene, it inflects both Achilles images with a shared erotic/elegiac tone. Finally, these wall paintings contribute crucial evidence to the argument in that they demonstrate that genre-play between epic and elegy was not an innovation confined to textual literary production. It was already a feature of Roman cultural life at large, extending into the popular, visual, and domestic sphere. The domestic context of these paintings is itself significant: Achilles' exposure occurs within a domestic, feminine-coded environment – the *domus* – which acts as an extension of the genre shift, a physical space of elegiac suspension and emotional intimacy as opposed to the masculine, public epic space of the *urbs*.[117]

[116] McAuley 2010: 50; McNelis 2024: 312.
[117] Valladares 2012: 321, 326.

GAZES WITHIN THE PAINTINGS

In this section, I explore how internal gazes – exchanged between Achilles, Thetis, Deidamia, Ulysses, and Lycomedes – deepen the elegiac reconfiguration of the myth, transforming the visual field into a space of emotional entanglement and narrative hesitation between the elegiac and epic genres.

Within the Pompeiian wall paintings, the figures are not inert or isolated; they are dynamically interconnected through a system of looks, gestures, and emotional signals that draw the spectator into their dramatic narrative. At the centre of this web stands Achilles – not as an active hero, but as an object of intense and conflicting gazes. This dynamic finds striking literary echoes in Statius' *Achilleid*, where language of sight and vision pervades the narrative. The *Achilleid* is rich in vocabulary of seeing, gazing, and revealing; Achilles is constantly observed, evaluated, and exposed both by himself and others. The painted scene anticipates and resonates with Statius' literary strategies, further suggesting that the elegisation of Achilles was not simply a Statian literary invention but part of a broader cultural fascination with imagining the hero's vulnerability, ambiguity, and emotional complexity. In this section, I will illustrate this through a combined analysis of the paintings and text.

Traditionally, epic figures are agents who command the world through action and vision: they see clearly, act decisively, and dominate their environments.[118] In contrast, elegy emphasises vulnerability, eroticisation, and emotional exposure: individuals are seen, desired, and destabilised by forces beyond their control. The wall paintings align themselves unmistakably with this latter, elegiac mode. Achilles is not depicted as an actor with agency, but as a spectacle that is caught, exposed, and literally gazed upon from all sides. The visual medium intensifies this loss of agency by arresting the narrative at precisely the moment of his exposure. Unlike epic narrative, which can move rapidly from discovery to reaction and renewed action, the painting fixes Achilles within this moment of vulnerability – he remains suspended beneath the surrounding gazes, unable

[118] Hom. *Il.* 20.490-503: Achilles' domination in battle; *Il*. 6.441-493: Hector summarises his role as hero; *Aen*. 12.938-952: Aeneas acts decisively in his duel against Turnus; *Il*. 2.85: Agamemnon as the shepherd of men.

to escape or progress beyond them. The stasis inherent in the image therefore reinforces an elegiac temporality. In the *Achilleid*, Achilles' first appearance is similarly mediated through an act of viewing. As the youth approaches, Chiron recalls to Thetis the heroes he has seen in the past.

> olim equidem, Argoos pinus cum Thessala reges
> hac ueheret, iuvenem Alciden et Thesea **uidi** –
> sed taceo. (*Ach*. 1.156-157)
> In time gone by, when the pine of Thessaly carried Argo's kings this way, I saw youthful Alcides and Theseus– but I am mum.'

Grammatically, *uidi* refers to Chiron's past sight of Heracles and Theseus; yet that remembered act of seeing is prompted and abruptly curtailed by the sight of Achilles approaching in the present – Chiron breaks off his story when he sees Achilles and realises he will soon be within earshot (*sed taceo*). Throughout the *Achilleid*, Achilles is characterised as an object of others' sight. This emphasis upon Achilles as the object of others' attention persists even as he begins to assume a more conventionally epic identity. At the opening of Book 2, as he finally departs for Troy, Achilles describes himself as *quaesitus*:

> bella ad Troiana ratesque
> Argolicas **quaesitus** eo. (*Ach*. 2. 18-19)
> I go to the Trojan war and the Argive ships. They have looked for me.

Quaesitus, the perfect passive participle of *quaero*, does not itself carry a specifically visual sense and should be distinguished from the language of gaze that characterises Achilles elsewhere. Yet, its passivity is significant. Even at the moment when Achilles appears finally to embrace his heroic trajectory, he characterises himself as someone sought by others. This recalls the earlier description of the entire Greek army longing for the absent Achilles and demanding him alone against Hector (*Ach*. 1.473-475). Achilles consequently remains positioned as an object of collective attention and desire even as he moves towards the active world of epic warfare.

Achilles is treated as a viewed object in both image and text, yet the gaze of Achilles also plays a vital part in demonstrating his role as an erotic figure in both media. Though he is

initially seen by Chiron and Thetis, her sequestering of Achilles to Skyros marks a transition to the eyes of Achilles.

> cum pueri tremefacta quies oculique patentes
> infusum sensere diem. stupet aëre primo:
> quae loca, qui fluctus, ubi Pelion? omnia uersa
> atque ignota uidet dubitatque agnoscere matrem. (*Ach.* 1.246-250)
> when the boy's sleep was shaken and his wide eyes felt daylight pouring in. At first sight of sky he was stunned: what place is this, what waves, where is Pelion? Everything he sees is changed and strange, and he doubts to recognise his mother.

This shift to the focus on Achilles' eyes is significant, as the eyes were meant to reflect internal feelings, providing true insight into the mind of our elegiac/epic hero (Plin. *HN* 11.145-146; TLL ix/2.448.43-48).[119] While Achilles resides on Mt Pelion with Chiron his eyes are described as tranquil (*tranquillaeque faces oculis*: *Ach.* 1.164), yet as Achilles is caught between places his eyes indicate a shift to confusion (*stupet*), uncertainty (*omnia ignota uidet*), and doubt (*dubitat agnoscere*). Though it is Achilles doing the seeing, it indicates a lack of control or agency. This develops further with his arrival on Skyros, marking a growing brightness in his eyes as he catches sight of Deidamia and his arrival to a world of the erotic.[120]

> hanc ubi ducentem longe socia agmina **uidit,**
> trux puer et nullo temeratus pectora motu
> deriguit totisque nouum bibit ossibus ignem.
> **nec latet haustus amor, sed fax uibrata medullis**
> **in uultus atque ora redit lucemque genarum**
> **tinguit et impulsam tenui sudore pererrat.**
> lactea Massagetae ueluti cum pocula fuscant
> sanguine puniceo uel ebur corrumpitur ostro,
> **sic uariis manifesta notis palletque rubetque**
> **flamma repens**. (*Ach.* 1.301-310).
> When the untamed boy, having been assailed previously in his heart by no passion, sees her leading the kindred troop, he stiffens and he drinks a new flame in all his bones. Nor does the love he has drunk hide, but the torch, brandished in his marrow, comes back to his features and face, and colours the radiance of his cheeks and runs over his face as it is struck by light sweat. As when the Massagetae colour milky cups

[119] McNelis 2024: 216; for the ancient view that shame was situated in the eyes: Arist. *Rh*. 1384a; Gibson 2003 on Ov. *Ars*. 3.203-204; Stat. *Theb*. 3.22; the Homeric Hector is similarly motivated at Hom. *Il.* 22.105-130.

[120] A metaphor for the brightness of one's eyes (e.g. Stat. *Theb.* 5.508, 6.396), *fax* is familiar erotic language (Prop. 2.3.14; Tib.3.8.6; Bessone 2018: 174); Bitto 2016: 211 indicates that Achilles, who at this point has not encountered girls, is free from the passions that will stir when he encounters Deidamia (*Ach.* 1.304); McNelis 2024: 182.

with red blood, or ivory is stained with purple, thus the new flame is obvious by various marks, and he grows pale- yellow and blushes.[121]

The simile likening Achilles' face to the Massagetae (*Ach*. 1.307-310) (an epic device with erotic/elegiac content) links Achilles' blush to that of Corinna's in Ovid's *Amores*, and to Lavinia's in the *Aeneid*. Corinna's blush is likened by Ovid to "the Assyrian ivory a Maeonian woman dyed (Ov. *Am*. 2.5.40),[122] while Lavinia's is described by Virgil as *indum sanguineo ueluti uiolauerit ostro / si quis ebur* ("just as if someone had defiled Indian ivory with blood-red purple." Virg. *Aen*. 12.67-68), when transferring to Lavinia's virginal blush the imagery of bloodshed from Homer's eroticised description of a leg-wound. The source of these similes in Hom. *Il*. 4.141-142: Ὡς δ' ὅτε τίς τ' ἐλέφαντα γυνὴ φοίνικι μιήνῃ / Μῃονίς: "as when a Maeonian woman stains ivory with purple").[123] This concatenation of epic similes transcends elegiac confines by making blush and wounds consanguineous, while simultaneously transforming Achilles into the blushing maiden in love. Before Achilles has donned his female disguise, he is already being transgendered. Furthermore, a connection is given in this moment to sight and elegy. Though it is Achilles' own sight that the reader is given insight into, it is his physical reaction to what he sees (Deidamia) that allows him to be gazed upon and read by other characters, who then dictate the next step in the narrative (*Ach*. 1.323-326). It is the facial expressions of Achilles, especially the paling and blushing (*palletque rubetque*) on his face (*in uultus*) and the casting of sly wanton glances that allows Thetis to discover his secret (*occupat arrepto iam conscia tempore mater*: "His mother is already aware of his secret": *Ach*. 1.318) and to see his indecision.

Though we do see what Achilles sees, ultimately, other figures still gaze upon his face, seeing and perceiving his emotions.

cur ora reduces
quidue parant oculi? pudet hoc mitescere cultu? (*Ach*. 1.271-272)
Why do you withdraw your face, what purpose is in your eyes?

[121] Translation by Charles McNelis.
[122] Her blush is also compared to the dawn, to a bride seeing her groom, to roses among lilies, to a lunar eclipse, and to tinted ivory (Ov. *Am*. 2.5.33-42).
[123] O'Rourke 2012: 400; McKeown 1998: 38; Boyd 1997: 110-116.

A Pompeiian viewer can see the way Achilles gazes at Deidamia (they are interlocked in a shared gaze), as well as the feminine disguise he has allowed his mother to dress him in as a result. Statius' reader is similarly presented with these elegiac themes through the language of visuality.[124] Though a viewer can see the intensity of the gaze between the pair for themselves, Statius must tell his reader of Achilles' repetitive glances towards her:

> illam oculis iterumque iterumque resumit. (*Ach.* 1.569)
> making eyes at her again and yet again.[125]

The repetition of *iterumque iterumque* does more than describe Achilles' recurrent glances; it tries to verbally enact the frozenness of the image. The doubled adverb momentarily stalls the reader in the middle of the line, requiring the eye to encounter the same word twice before proceeding. Its placement at the centre of the verse also invites comparison with the *gramma meson* mode of viewing. The repeated *iterumque iterumque* fixes the reader's eye upon the middle of the line before allowing it to proceed outwards towards its completion. In this way, Statius verbally approximates the stasis of the painted scene. Just as Achilles and Deidamia remain fixed within an interlocked gaze on the wall, the syntax delays the reader within the repeated act of looking. The near-identical repetition can even produce a momentary visual hesitation, a kind of textual double-take, in which the reader is made to experience the persistence of Achilles' gaze rather than merely being told of it.

Yet, while Achilles has eyes only for Deidamia, everybody else has eyes only for Achilles. In the *Achilleid*, in a moment not depicted by the Pompeiian wall paintings, Achilles' female companions marvel at the sight of their 'sister':

> *mirantur comites* (*Ach.* 1.606)
> His companions marvel
>
> nec turba piarum
> Scyriadum **cessat nimio** defigere uisu
> uirginis ora nouae, quantum ceruice comisque

[124] For other literary instances of communication through facial expressions rather than words, see: Ov. *Am.* 1.7.21, 1.11.18, 2.7.5; *Met.* 3.241; *Ars* 1.572; Luc. 3.739, 6.821; Val. Flacc. 6.584; Quint. *Inst.* 11.3*: [uultus] est saepe pro omnibus uerbis*, and Ovid refers to a *vultum loquacem*: Rosati 1992: 273; McNelis 2024: 249.
[125] McNelis notes that *oculis resumit* conflates physical contact with gazing. For the ancient connection between desire and sight, see: Prop. 1.1.6; Sanna 2007: 209-210, 213; McNelis 2024: 295.

> emineat quantumque umeros ac pectora fundat. (*Ach*. 1.366-369)
> The flock of duteous Scyrian girls **continue** to stare **relentlessly** at the new maiden's face, marvelling how she outtops them by neck and hair, how broad she spreads her chest and shoulders.

Elegy is often defined by gaze – that of the lover at his beloved, and here Achilles is the recipient of this erotic gaze. Statius' description of this marvelling as continuous and relentless (*nimio*) suggests that this gaze and objectification of Achilles' body by the group of girls is almost an assault or an invasion. Parallels can be found here to epic hero Orpheus and his treatment by the Ciconian women, who marvelled at Orpheus' beauty and music and were spurned by his lack of attention, going on to tear him to pieces (Ov. *Met*. 11.1-66).

Indeed, the majority of gazes directed at Achilles can be interpreted as predatory or threatening in nature. In 80% of surviving Flavian depictions,[126] Achilles is shown either in the moment of discovery – clutching a weapon, revealing his martial nature – or at the threshold of the revelation. Crucially, the gazes of nearly every other figure in the scene converge on Achilles. The sister of Deidamia, behind Achilles, casts a startled glance toward him. Deidamia, retreating, fixes her eyes on Achilles in a look of longing, fear, and loss. Ulysses and Diomedes, the orchestrators of the deception, glare intensely at Achilles, their gazes not simply observing but actively seizing him. The soldiers framing the scene contribute to this visual pressure, creating a sense of enclosure and entrapment. Despite Achilles becoming the epic hero, casting off his elegiac mode, this accumulation of gazes' marks Achilles still as object rather than agent – the vulnerable and objectified elegiac figure rather than the epic subject commanding the field.[127] The intense gaze of an epic male onlooker at an erotic object is a common scene across Pompeiian wall painting (Theseus at Ariadne, Perseus at Andromeda, and Dionysus at sleeping Maenads), associating gaze with erotic contemplation in Roman art.[128] Achilles, in this moment, is not the overthrower of Asia (*Ach*. 1.530; or the doom of the Teucrians and Priam: *Ach*. 1.475-476) but an erotic victim who has not yet fully recognised his own transition into epic heroism. In one especially telling detail, Ulysses' hand grasps

[126] Heslin 2005: 236.
[127] Fredrick 2012: 430.
[128] Fredrick 2012: 428.

Achilles' wrist in a gesture that is emblematic of female rape.[129] Furthermore, in the *Ars Amatoria,* Ovid refers to the rape of the Sabine women as an ambush (*scilicet ex illo sollemnia more theatra / nunc quoque formosis insidiosa manent*: Ov. *Ars Am*. 1.133-134). It is by ambush that Ulysses uncovers Achilles' ruse (*Ach*. 1.718-725, 875-876), further likening Achilles' treatment here to a seized female victim. Though not all ambushes in Greek and Latin literature are related to rape, Ovid's comparison again draws parallels between love and war – the two spheres in which Achilles finds himself trapped in this moment. In the paintings, Ulysses and Diomedes, typically framed as agents of epic cunning and destiny, appear as villains in this context – invaders who shatter the temporary idyll of Skyros with violence and coercion.

Within the *Achilleid*, Ulysses and Diomedes are likened to wolves, suggesting that their gaze is also predatory and threatening:

> procedunt, gemini ceu foedere iuncto
> hiberna sub nocte lupi: licet et sua pulset
> natorumque fames, penitus rabiemque minasque
> dissimulant humilesque meant, ne nuntiet hostes
> cura canum et trepidos moneat uigilare magistros. (*Ach*. 1.704-708)
> They go forward like two wolves in league on a winter's night; though hunger, their own and their cubs', pushes them, they quite dissemble their ravening threats and move meekly, lest watchdogs announce the enemy and warn the fearful shepherds to keep vigil.

One of the more formal elements prescribed to the genre of epic is the extended similes,[130] and here Statius reasserts his tale as an epic one. Wolf similes in Homeric epic serve to highlight bloodthirsty and destructive behaviour,[131] with Virgilian similes involving wolves also highlighting the animal's trickery and persistence.[132] Gregor Bitto compares this scene to Stat. *Theb*. 10.42-48, highlighting the animals' cunning.[133] Though the *Iliad* likens the pair to lions, Charles McNelis highlights that the Homeric

[129] "Rape of the Leucippides" Attic Red Figure hydria, c. 420-410BCE. Attributed to the Meidias Painter. British Museum, London E224; "Theseus Pursuing Helen" Attic Red Figure Bell Krater, c. 460-450BCE. Attributed to the Niobid Painter. Madison, Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin 69.31.1; "Abduction of Helen by Theseus" Attic red figure stamnos, late 5th century BCE Polygnotos. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 18063; Bergmann 2023: 188. For further examples, see Cohen 2007.
[130] Boyd 1997: 90-131.
[131] Hom. *Il*. 4.471, 11.72, 16.156, 352; Verg. *Aen*. 2.355-360, 9.59-66, 566, 11.809-815.
[132] Verg. *Aen*. 2.355-360, 9.59-66; Verg. *G*. 3.537-538; *Aen*. 9.59-66.
[133] Bitto 2016: 303.

Odysseus nonetheless has lupine characteristics: his grandfather was Autolycus ("Lone-Wolf"), a notorious thief (Hom. *Od*. 19.395-396) who stole from a house that he broke into (Hom. *Il*. 10.266-271) – a background that proves helpful for entering the Skyrian palace and stealing away Achilles. The two heroes are subsequently treated as wolves at [E.] Rh. 782-784.[134]

The Pompeiian paintings do not represent Ulysses and Diomedes literally as wolves but translate this predatory relationship into visual terms. The two Greeks converge upon Achilles from the surrounding space and direct their attention towards the centrally exposed youth. Achilles is thereby enclosed by those who have come specifically to identify and capture him. What Statius represents narratively as the stealthy approach of predators upon unsuspecting prey is made spatially visible in the paintings – the hunters surround their quarry, and Achilles becomes the object upon which their attention is concentrated.

This predatory dynamic becomes explicitly visual in Statius when Ulysses begins his search:

> interea uisu perlustrat Vlixes
> scrutaturque domum, si qua uestigia magnae
> uirginis aut dubia facies suspecta figura; (*Ach*. 1.742-744)
> Meantime, Ulysses' eyes scan and scrutinise the house, looking for traces of a tall maiden or a face whose doubtful lineaments prompt suspicion.

The vocabulary makes Ulysses' looking unusually precise. *Perlustrare* can denote a thorough visual survey, while *scrutari* suggests a more penetrating and investigative search. The movement from *uisu perlustrat* to *scrutatur* therefore narrows Ulysses' gaze from general survey to close scrutiny; he first visually takes in the house before searching it for the particular *uestigia* and suspicious *facies* that might betray Achilles. His gaze is predatory not merely because Statius has compared him to a wolf, but because looking itself becomes the instrument through which his prey will be located and exposed.

[134] McNelis 2024: 327.

Statius' likening of Ulysses to a wolf raises interesting questions about the name of Lycomedes (Λυκομήδης), and his role in this story. Lycomedes - (λύκος) meaning "wolf", and μήδεα (mēdea) meaning "counsel" – provides comedic irony in that Lycomedes is characterised in the text as an unaware and passive leader, who is deceived by a much wiser wolflike counsellor (Ulysses). Given that Diomedes' name (Διομήδης) is often taken to mean "advised by Zeus", it is perhaps possible that Lycomedes' name (advised by the wolf) conveniently serves to emphasise Ulysses' role as the cunning hunter, Lycomedes' as a fearful shepherd, and Achilles' as the badly protected prey. This configuration is made explicit only a few lines later, when Ulysses is no longer merely compared to a predator but directly figured as a hunter:

> uelut ille cubilia praedae
> indubitata tenens muto legit arua Molosso
> **uenator**, uideat donec sub frondibus hostem
> porrectum somno positosque in caespite dentes. (*Ach.* 1.746-749)
> Even so your hunter, who knows for certain his quarry's lair, traverses the fields with his mute Molossian, till he may see his foe stretched sleeping in the shade, fangs resting on the turf.

Ulysses' search has thus developed from lupine stealth, to visual scrutiny, to explicit hunting. Both Lycomedes and Achilles are unaware that he is being sought. Indeed, it is because of this lack of awareness that Achilles' betrays himself through his inappropriate gaze (*dubia figura: Ach*. 1. 744) that will expose him. Again in the *Ars*, Ovid instructs his pupils how to best go "hunting" for girls: *sed tu praecipue curvis* ***uenare*** *theatris; / haec loca sunt uoto fertiliora tuo: Ars Am*. 1.89-90).[135] This connection between Statius' hunter (*uenator*: *Ach*. 1. 748), Ovid's hunting (*uenare*: Ov. *Ars Am*. 1. 89) and their prey – in Ovid's case girls, and in Statius' Achilles – serves to re-emphasise Achilles' role as an erotic victim. Yet, Statius' decision to frame this within epic simile also highlights the inseparability of the epic and elegiac in this moment.

The juxtaposition of epic gaze and elegiac gaze is stark. In epic, vision confirms mastery: heroes look out over the battlefield, recognise their fates, and act decisively. In the *Iliad*, the epic gaze of Achilles terrifies Hector, who flees from the sight of him (Hom. *Il*. 22.131-187, 247-366). In elegy, vision destabilises – lovers are caught up in seeing and being

[135] Kennedy 2012: 190-191.

seen, rendered powerless by the emotional charge of spectatorship. The Skyros paintings participate strongly in this latter mode, although their emphasis upon sight is also inseparable from the nature of the visual medium itself. A wall painting necessarily communicates through looking and can therefore make the power of vision materially and spatially explicit. What gives these scenes their specifically elegiac colouring is not simply that they privilege the gaze, but that they organise looking around erotic exposure and loss of control. Achilles is overwhelmed not by martial opponents but by being seen, desired, and forced to reveal his attachment to Deidamia. Although he himself looks at Deidamia, that gaze betrays him. It exposes their erotic bond to the surrounding spectators, whose own gazes penetrate the disguise and make Achilles' private desire publicly visible.

Just as Thetis uses Achilles' eyes as a vehicle for seeing Achilles' thoughts, so Ulysses is the other main proponent for seeing truth in Achilles' eyes.[136]

> attamen erectumque genas oculisque uagantem
> nullaque uirginei servantem signa pudoris
> defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat. (*Ach*. 1.764-766)
> Even so, he marks one with face erect and roving eyes, that observes no mark of maiden modesty, and with a sidelong glance points her out to his companion.

Fredrick notes that a key element in the visual pleasure in elegy is the suspicious gaze that investigates and interrogates the *puella*.[137] Here, Ulysses searches for the suspicious *puella*, reinforcing Achilles' position as an erotic victim. While the other (actual) girls are afraid, turning their eyes down and away (*cum paueant aliae demissaque lumina flectant*: *Ach*. 1.795), Ulysses sees that Achilles shares his interrogative, masculine gaze and is all attention (*aspicit intentum uigilique* (*Ach*. 1.794), with erect face and roving eyes (*erectumque genas oculisque uagantem*: *Ach*. 1.764). Though Achilles' eyes were tranquil at the beginning of the story, they now betray his masculinity when compared with the daughters of Lycomedes, highlighting the awakening of the epic Achilles. Achilles' face (*dubia figura*), inappropriate for a female, is perfectly appropriate for a male – erect and roving.

[136] McNelis 2024: 338.
[137] Fredrick 2012: 429.

Ulysses' own gaze, however, operates differently. Statius says that he *defigit* Achilles (1.766) – from *defigere*, "to fix" or "fasten," a verb which can also describe fixing the eyes or attention intently upon an object. The term therefore gives Ulysses' gaze an arresting quality – Achilles' wandering vision is fixed beneath the scrutiny of his observer. The effect recalls the visual stasis of the Pompeiian paintings, in which Achilles is similarly immobilised at the centre of a network of gazes. Statius' language momentarily transforms him into something approaching a viewed object. The roaming eyes that reveal his inner identity are caught and held by Ulysses' more controlled vision. Yet the asymmetry between the two gazes is more pointed still. Having recognised Achilles, Ulysses communicates his discovery to Diomedes *obliquo lumine* (1.766), "with a sidelong glance." He therefore succeeds in communicating without visibly showing this to the others. Unlike Achilles' uncontrolled eyes, which disclose information to everyone capable of reading them, Ulysses' glance is oblique, disciplined, and directed towards a single viewer. Achilles sees and thereby betrays himself, whereas Ulysses sees, and then communicates what he has discovered without revealing his own intentions.

Significantly, in both the visual and literary media, Achilles uses this active gaze to look almost exclusively at Deidamia. In the moment of discovery and seizure of Achilles, his body moves towards Ulysses and Diomedes – towards the world of war and epic destiny – but his gaze turns back toward Deidamia. The tension of Achilles' hanging between epic/elegy is clear here. Epic Achilles has awoken, yet he uses his active, epic gaze for elegiac purposes. Neither Achilles (the epic or elegiac versions) is dominant in this moment. Fredrick also notes that elegy's narrative – the separation from the *puella* due to a rival – complements its frozen moments of erotic contemplation.[138] In this instance, Achilles' separation from the *puella* (Deidamia) due to a rival (Ulysses) interrupts Achilles and Deidamia's idyll on Skyros and forces Achilles to contemplate his next move. This backward glance resists the forward-driving energy of epic narrative. Rather than meeting the aggressive gazes of Ulysses and Diomedes, Achilles' visual and emotional tether remains with the world he is about to lose: the intimate, feminised, domestic space of

[138] Fredrick 2012: 431.

Skyros. His look is not the confident, outward-facing stare of the Homeric hero,[139] but a complex, affectively loaded glance characterised by hesitation and personal attachment. This visual tension fundamentally challenges the essential martial image of Achilles. It draws the viewer into the elegiac tradition, where Achilles occupies the traditional elegiac role: the exposed lover, the vulnerable object of competing gazes, the figure whose identity is fractured between public epic expectation and private elegiac feeling.

> cuius cum grandia primum
> lamenta et notas accepit pectore uoces,
> haesit et occulto uirtus infracta calore est.
> demittit clipeum regisque ad lumina uersus
> attonitum factis inopinaque monstra paventem,
> sicut erat (*Ach*. 1.886-891)
> When he heard her loud lament and his mind received the familiar voice, he paused and valour yielded to hidden passion. He drops the shield and turning to face the king's threshold as he sits stunned by what has passed and fearing things strange and sudden.

The resistance to epic movement is made clear in static language. When Achilles hears Deidamia's lament, he *haesit* (*Ach*. 1.888), recalling the earlier *haeret* that indicates his hesitation (*Ach*. 1.804). The repeated use of *haerere* freezes Achilles at the points at which the epic narrative demands movement. As in the wall paintings, where the moment of discovery is permanently suspended before the viewer, Achilles is repeatedly 'fixed' within moments of erotic indecision. Not only does Achilles hesitate before leaving (*haeret*: Ach. 1. 804), but his masculinity is broken in this moment (*uirtus infracta*: *Ach*. 1.888) and he is afraid (*pauentem*: *Ach*. 1.890). He lowers his shield (*demittit clipeum*: (*Ach*. 1.887), in a reversal of his act of taking it up in the first place (Ach. 1. 879) – symbolic of abandoning a fight.[140] Notably, Achilles was previously characterised by his erect face and the picking up of the arms. Now he places down these male behaviours and items, so unmanned by Deidamia he is.

Ultimately, Achilles is compelled to leave by the men, and he does not resist them, yet his last act regarding Deidamia and Skyros is to turn back toward the island, his *uirtus*

[139] For example, the ὑπόδρα ἰδών of Homeric Achilles (Hom. *Il*. 1.148)
[140] "Indeed, *demisit* is the language of abandoning a fight": McNelis 2024: 365; Stat. *Theb*. 9.237, 10.423; Sen. *Ep*. 66.50.

abandoning him for love (*Ach*. 1.888). The tension persists even after Achilles has physically departed Skyros:

> coniunx oculisque in carbasa fixis
> ibat et ipsa freto, et puppem iam sola uidebat.
> ille quoque obliquos dilecta ad moenia uultus
> declinat uiduamque domum gemitusque relictae
> cogitat: occultus sub corde renascitur ardor
> datque locum uirtus. (*Ach*. 2.25-29)
> His wife fixed her gaze upon the sails. She herself went on the waters, and now only she saw the vessel. Achilles too turns his face aside towards the beloved walls and thinks of the widowed house and the sobs of the deserted one. Fire hidden in his heart is reborn and valour yields place.

Deidamia's *oculis … fixis* prolong the visual stasis of the preceding episode. Although Achilles' ship is physically carrying him forward towards Troy, her eyes remain fixed upon its sails, visually resisting the separation imposed by epic narrative. The formulation recalls the wider literary language of emotionally charged, immobilised vision, for example, Dido in the Underworld, who holds her eyes fixed upon the ground, *solo fixos oculos* (*Aen*. 6.469). Here, however, Deidamia's fixed gaze does not refuse contact but desperately sustains it.

Achilles' response is equally revealing. He turns *obliquos … uultus* towards the beloved walls of Skyros (*Ach*. 2.27-28). The adjective *obliquus* is particularly significant in light of Ulysses' earlier *obliquo lumine* (*Ach*. 1.766). Ulysses' sidelong glance is strategic – it communicates his discovery to Diomedes without exposing his own intentions. Achilles' oblique gaze performs almost the opposite function. His face turns aside from the direction of his epic journey and back towards the domestic and erotic world he has ostensibly left behind. This visual orientation exposes Achilles' inability to fully submit to the forward trajectory of epic. Ulysses looks aside in order to conceal; Achilles looks aside because he cannot conceal.

This distinction is particularly striking because Statius explicitly describes Achilles' renewed desire as *occultus*: *occultus sub corde renascitur ardor* (*Ach*. 2.29). The passion may be hidden beneath his heart, but his gaze makes it externally visible. Ulysses immediately senses Achilles' grief and intervenes with consoling speech (*Ach*. 2.30-31).

As during the discovery scene on Skyros, Achilles' eyes disclose precisely what he cannot or does not articulate. His visual behaviour therefore does more than make him an object of other characters' gazes. His own gaze is itself unusually visible and self-betraying, repeatedly allowing those around him access to an ostensibly private interior state.

Thus far, sight has operated primarily between characters. Achilles sees and is seen, and his competing identities are exposed through those exchanges of gaze. The shield introduces a further complication, however, by turning Achilles' gaze back upon himself. The next section therefore moves from interpersonal viewing to self-viewing, asking what happens when the epic hero becomes simultaneously spectator and image.

Mirrors, Shields, and Reflections: Eroticising the Hero

The network of gazes within the Skyros paintings repositions Achilles as an object of desire and emotional exposure, and the motif of mirrors, shields, and reflections deepens this transformation. These reflective surfaces introduce a new layer of complexity: they invite Achilles not just to be seen by others or to see others, but to see himself – and crucially, to confront his own identity which hangs in the balance at the threshold between elegy and epic.

In the wall paintings inv. 9110 and 116085, Achilles is depicted with a shield positioned near his feet, sometimes located near the trappings of femininity he has dropped (often a mirror). In these images, the shield itself bears an image of a young Achilles with Chiron, recalling his youth and martial education on Mt Pelion - a nod to his epic destiny (Figure 14):



gure 14: eta s o t e s e s n t e two *c es on yros* rescoes. e t: eta o , nv. 116085, from House IX.5.2, Pompeii. Right: detail of MANN, inv. 9110, from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6-7), Pompeii.

This reflection is present across representations in Pompeii, and the image reflects another fresco found in Herculaneum (MANN inv. 9109, Figure 9). The schema is known also from a marble statue group from the Saepta Julia in Rome (Plin. *HN* 36.29).[141] As Achilles reaches for the shield, his hand points directly to the Chiron image at the centre of the shield. Furthermore, as Diomedes grasps Achilles' arm, his own arm parallels the embrace of Chiron visible on the shield.[142]

This moment, rather unnoteworthy in the *Achilleid*, comes to life when compared with the Pompeiian representations.

> at ferus Aeacides, radiantem ut comminus orbem
> caelatum pugnas (saeuis et forte rubebat
> bellorum maculis) acclinem conspicit hastae,
> infremuit torsitque genas, et fronte relicta
> surrexere comae (*Ach.* 1.852-856)
> But when fierce Aeacides views close at hand the shining round, chased with battles (and by chance it was ruddy with cruel spots of war), as it leaned against the spear, he cried out and rolled his eyes, the hair stood up from his forehead.
>
> ut uero accessit propius luxque aemula uultum
> reddidit et simili talem se uidit in auro,
> horruit erubuitque simul. (*Ach.* 1.864-866)

[141] Bergmann 2023: 188.
[142] Trimble 2002: 234.

> But when the lad came close and the rival radiance gave back his face and he saw himself as he was in the gold likeness, he shuddered and blushed both together.

In the wall paintings, the shields show a 'reflection' of a younger Achilles with Chiron. In the *Achilleid*, Achilles sees an actual reflection of his own face, with bloodspots mirroring the blush on his own cheeks. The shield is *caelatum pugnas* ("engraved with battles": *Ach*. 1.853). In this instance, the visual and literary representations of the shields do not match. Feeney notes, however, that Ulysses immediately addresses Achilles as *semiferi Chironis alumnus* (*Ach*. 1.868) when he picks up the shield,[143] almost certainly referencing the talismanic shield scene present in the paintings.

When Achilles sees himself on the shield in both media, Achilles' gaze finally becomes the object of itself. His reaction is a moment of self-reflexive self-recognition, and self-revelation.[144] Yet, Statius is particularly attentive to the elegiac motif of seeing and self-seeing. This epic moment of Achilles catching sight of himself in the *Achilleid* is drawn back into the realm of elegy, for this shield does not reflect Chiron and the young Achilles, but Achilles' own face, caught in a moment of almost Narcissus-like self-awareness.

Achilles' sees his reflection in the shield and his reaction is to blush (*erubuit*: *Ach*. 1.866). This reaction calls back to the moment he first sees Deidamia and blushes (in a simile that likens him to Corinna and Lavinia): *sic uariis manifesta notis palletque rubetque / flamma repens* (*Ach*. 1.309-310); emphasising the elegiac and erotic elements in both moments. The spots of blood, which act as blush spots on Achilles' cheeks provide another moment of elegiac/epic crossover. As Virgil likened Lavinia's blush to a leg wound, here, blood and Achilles' blush are one and the same, demonstrating again the extent to which elegy and epic were generically intertwined.

As previously noted, the visual and literary representations of the shields do not match, and we are able to see the potential limitations in the application of intermediality. This, however, provides insight into Statian narrative innovation and authority. In Statius'

[143] Feeney 2004: 98.
[144] Feeney 2004: 98.

telling, Achilles' confrontation with his own reflection places Achilles simultaneously in both epic and elegiac spaces. In this moment, the shield is not just a token of martial identity. It becomes a reflective surface – a mirror in which Achilles glimpses himself, caught between boyhood and the contemporary verge of manhood, between private emotion and public action. Seneca tells us that mirrors were designed so that people could know themselves (Sen. *Nat*. 1.17.4*: ut homo ipse se nosset*); however, debate also existed as to whether images in mirrors were truthful or deceptive (Sen. *Nat.* 1.15.7).[145] Achilles' reflection is both at once: he sees himself (*se uidit*) but in disguise.[146]

This motif resonates with broader traditions of Roman elegiac culture, where looking into a mirror often signals a moment of erotic awakening, self-awareness, or vulnerability. The myth of Narcissus, who fatally falls in love with his own reflection, potentially hovers in the background of this moment. Mirrors in Roman domestic art frequently stage scenes of toilette, beautification, and erotic self-regard, particularly for feminine figures.[147] Achilles' shield, in this moment, absorbs and refracts those same elegiac and erotic connotations. It becomes not merely a promise of future war, but a liminal object that suspends Achilles between two worlds. This moment is the catalyst which transforms Achilles into an epic hero, and yet it is a highly eroticised reaction. It gestures toward Achilles' epic future – toward the hard, metallic world of combat and *kleos* – but at the same time, it holds him fast within an elegiac space of beauty, shame, and erotic self-consciousness. In inv. 9110, the juxtaposition is made even clearer – a discarded mirror lies beside the shield. Achilles reaches toward the shield, but he cannot fully shed the elegiac, feminised world he has inhabited as he will put back down the arms when he thinks of abandoning Deidamia. Even the act of arming is compromised and can be eroticised: the shield and arms seduce Achilles as much as Deidamia. In these paintings, the shield itself becomes an erotic object – a reflective surface symbolic of domestic, feminine beautification that calls Achilles toward his masculine, epic destiny. In other

[145] Bartsch 2006: 37-41.
[146] Russell 2014: 112.
[147] Gel. 6.12.5; Bartsch 2006: 29-35; Austin-Olson on Ar. *Th*. 140; McNelis 2024: 359.
McNelis (2024: 359) notes that golden mirrors are particularly symptomatic of luxury and effeminacy (Sen. *Nat*. 1. 17.8), for their role in providing likenesses (Stat. *Silv*. 2.7.129-130; Juv. 2.99-101: Otho gazes into a shield as if it were a mirror).

words, the shield is just as much an elegiac mirror as it is an epic weapon. The tension between the masculine shield and the female mirror was also exploited by Apollonius Rhodius in the epic *Argonautica*. During the ekphrasis of the elaborate cloak worn by Jason before his encounter with Hypsipyle, Aphrodite is depicted gazing at her own reflection in the bronze shield of Ares (*Argon*. 1.742-746). The martial object is thereby converted into an instrument of erotic self-regard.[148]

The paintings, then, visualise what Statius' poem verbalises: Achilles is a creature of gazes and reflections, caught between actor and object, between epic agent and elegiac spectacle. Both media insist that Achilles' heroism is not simply asserted through action but negotiated and filtered through the elegiac acts of seeing, being seen, and seeing oneself. This dynamic foregrounds a larger cultural concern with the instability of identity under the pressure of perception. Achilles does not transition from boy to warrior, but he oscillates between different emotional and visual registers, entangled in the gaze of others and trapped both in the discarded mirror and the reflection of the shield. In both painting and poetry, mirrors and shields expose the fraught process by which private feeling and public destiny are stitched together – and in doing so, they eroticise and elegise the fabric of Roman epic identity.

The entanglement of gazes, reflections, and eroticised objects within the paintings thus situates Achilles in a moment between elegy and epic. Yet this emotional and visual destabilisation is not confined to the immediate scene of Skyros alone. Rather, the paintings activate a rich web of mythological associations that deepen and complicate the viewer's experience. By subtly invoking other mythic episodes, like that of Narcissus – scenes of longing, loss, delayed heroism, and erotic entrapment – these artworks embed Achilles' moment of exposure within a much broader cultural network of elegiac narratives. In the following section, I turn to the layers of mythic allusion that are present within the imagery, revealing how the visual field itself becomes a dynamic, intertextual space where multiple myths, genres, and emotional registers meet in a complicated nexus.

[148] Barchiesi 2005: 63; McNelis 2024: 359.

Mythic Allusions: A Broader Epic Elegiac Network

Within this case study, it is also evident that gaze is used as a tool to allude to other mythic figures who share this liminal space between the epic and elegiac realms. The emotional and visual elegisation of Achilles at Skyros does not exist in isolation. Instead, the paintings tap into a wider mythological network of figures where gaze demonstrates moments of profound emotional and epic tension – instances where personal love threaten or delay heroic duty. By embedding these visual echoes, the images encourage the viewer to read Achilles' moment not only through the lens of his own biography, but as part of a much larger cultural reflection on the blurred lines between elegy and epic.

Most prominently, the figure of Ulysses himself, central in the discovery of Achilles, carries with him his own draft-dodging attempt. Ulysses feigns madness to avoid joining the war effort, yoking oxen to a plough and sowing his fields with salt (Apollod. *Epit*. 3.7; Hyg. *Fab*. 95). Yet the ruse is uncovered when Palamedes places the infant Telemachus in front of the plough, forcing Ulysses to intervene to save his son. Just as with Achilles, Ulysses' love for his wife threatens to forestall his epic future. It takes the actions of another warrior figure (Palamedes) to uncover the plot and force him into epic action. The presence of Ulysses in the Skyros paintings thus doubles the thematic tension. The very agent who forces Achilles into his epic destiny is himself a figure marked by an earlier elegiac deception and hesitation. Within the paintings (inv. 116085 and especially inv. 9110), Ulysses is notable for the intensity of his glare at Achilles. In the wall paintings, a triangle of gazes occurs: Achilles and Deidamia (parents to the newborn Pyrrhus) are locked in gaze, while Ulysses intrudes upon the chaotic scene and compels Achilles to Aulis. Outside of this network of gazes between Achilles, Deidamia, and Ulysses, Lycomedes looks on helplessly. Presumably, a viewer familiar with the myths could imagine a similar triangular gaze occurring on Ithaca: Penelope and Ulysses (also parents to a newborn son) staring at one another, while Palamedes intrudes upon the chaotic scene and commands Ulysses to Aulis. Laertes the king was presumably as helpless as Lycomedes in this moment of deceit and discovery. Indeed, Gibson notes that "the triangle of love, beloved and rival and the tensions that arise from the clashes between

the three" was a basic convention that underpinned the narrative of many elegies (Prop. 1.5;1.8; Tib. 1.5, 1.6; Ov. *Am*. 2.5, 2.19).[149]

Allusions to this earlier mythic episode are discoverable also within the *Achilleid*. Near the beginning of the text, Neptune tells Thetis that she may not wreck Paris' fleet, but that she will ultimately avenge the war and loss of her son: *et dirum pariter quaeremus Vlixem*. ("and we both alike will search for dire Ulysses": *Ach*. 1.98). This references the gods' hindrance of Ulysses' journey home and emphasises Ulysses' characterisation as a man who is always being sought. An (admittedly tenuous) allusion can be found here to the Greek search for Ulysses before the war; Achilles and Ulysses, both epic heroes, are linked here in that the reader's introduction to the character requires a search and a disguise. Furthermore, Ulysses is characterised often as the *haerentem Ithacum* (*Ach*. 1.538), who delays (*tardat*: *Ach*. 1.547); recalling his Homeric cautiousness,[150] but also his delay in joining the war effort. As Palamedes thwarted Ulysses' attempt to remain disguised on Ithaca, so does Ulysses now take the role of Palamedes in discovering Achilles. Ironically, he asks Achilles: *quid haeres?* ("Why do you hesitate?": *Ach*. 1.867), before commanding him: *heia, abrumpe moras!* ("Up now, no more delay!": *Ach*. 1.872).

A similar tension characterises Aeneas' sojourn at Carthage. Having fallen in love with and married Dido, Aeneas looks likely to abandon his fated journey to Italy. The Carthaginian queen becomes another elegiac trap: her love offers personal erotic fulfilment but disrupts his epic heroic obligation.[151] Mercury intervenes, reminding Aeneas of his divine mission, and that love must be sacrificed for the sake of duty. The visual memory of Aeneas and Dido likely hovers fresh behind the Skyros scene for a Roman viewer, given the semi-recent publication of the *Aeneid*. Allusions between Aeneas and Achilles are made in the *Achilleid* – Statius repurposes *talia dicentum* (*Ach*. 1.956), a phrase first attested in the *Aeneid* as part of the final words Aeneas speaks to Dido (Verg. *Aen*. 4.362).[152] Like Achilles, Aeneas looks back towards Carthage as he sails

[149] Gibson 2005: 161.
[150] McNelis 2024: 288; Hom. *Od*. 17.292.
[151] Hardie 2005: 89; Cairns 1989: 129-150; O'Rourke 2012: 401.
[152] McNelis 2024: 379.

away to his epic destiny (*Aen*. 5.3). The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice also shadows the elegiac dynamics at Skyros. Orpheus' fatal backward glance (Ov. *Met*. 10.56-59; Verg. *G*. 4.490-498) – an act of illicit erotic viewing – transforms Eurydice's recovery into Orpheus' irretrievable loss.[153] The act of looking in the cases of Orpheus, Aeneas, and Achilles precedes the loss of love.

The story of Menelaus and Helen during the sack of Troy underscores another moment in which erotic gaze interrupts epic violence. Menelaus, having sworn to kill Helen on sight at the conclusion of the war, encounters her in her chambers and is so overwhelmed by her beauty that he drops his sword in a moment where sight disarms action. Love unmans Menelaus, dissolving his epic promise of vengeance (Eur. *Andr*. 628-639; Apollod. *Ep*. 5.23; Hyg. *Fab*. 123). In the paintings of Skyros, Achilles similarly falters. His gaze lingers not on the epic future but on Deidamia, trapped in an elegiac moment of emotional and erotic stasis. Achilles drops his shield and his *uirtus* is *infracta*. Furthermore, the colours of Achilles' skin, visible in the paintings and described by Statius (likened to milk mixed with blood, and to ivory stained by purple: *Ach*. 1. 307-308) recall both wounds received by Menelaus in the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il*. 4.141-145), and the blush of Lavinia in the *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen*. 12.64-69: *Lavinia… / flagrantis perfuse genas, cui plurimus ignem / subiecit rubor… / indum sanguineo ueluti uiolauerit ostro / si quis ebur*…), which kindles Turnus' desire for war.

McNelis convincingly finds mythic allusions to Aeneas and Theseus in Achilles' promises to Deidamia upon his departure:

> Talia dicentem non ipse immotus Achilles
> solatur iuratque fidem iurataque fletus
> pondet et ingentis famulas captumque reuersus
> Ilion et Phrygiae promittit munera gazae. (*Ach*. 1.956-959)
> As thus she speaks, Achilles comforts her, himself not unmoved, swearing fidelity and guaranteeing what he swears with tears. He promises strapping handmaidens and captured Ilium and gifts of Phrygian treasure on his return.

[153] Illicit erotic viewing can also be found in the myth of Diana and Actaeon, who is punished for what he sees (Ov. *Met*. 3.138-252).

Though Achilles' language is replete with promises (*iurat, iurataque, spondet, promittit*), the earlier allusions to Aeneas and Theseus, both of whom sail away never to return (Ov. *Her.* 10.30), make it clear that these promises are empty (*irrita uentosae rapiebant uerba procellae*: *Ach*. 1. 960). Prophecy and the literary tradition prove to be an insurmountable boundary that even Achilles cannot transgress – he is again subject to the power of poetic words.[154] I would also add Jason to this list of allusions, who leaves Hypsipyle on Lemnos with their twin sons despite promises to return and rule alongside her (Ov. *Her.* 6. 20). Similarly, Protesilaus sails away from his new bride, Laodamia, never to return to her (Hom. *Il.* 2.698-702; Ov. *Her*. 13.4), a mythic tradition to which I return in Chapter Three in considering Protesilaus' relationship with Laodamia and the problem of heroic presence and absence.

Links can also be made between both Achilles and Ulysses and the erotic myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Thetis' transformation of Achilles into a young girl is described by Statius:

> qualiter artifici uicturae pollice cerae
> accipiunt formas ignemque manumque sequuntur,
> talis erat diuae natum mutantis imago. (*Ach.* 1.332-334)
> As wax that an artist's thumb will bring to life receives shape and follows fire and hand,
> such was the semblance of the goddess as she transformed her son.

Allusion to Ovid's Pygmalion is surely clear here: Thetis acts as Pygmalion to transform Achilles into her perfect girl.[155] Here, Statius provides another link between art and text – Achilles himself becomes a work of plastic art under Thetis' thumb. Likewise, the *Odyssey* functions as a model for this simile, where Athena, compared to a craftsman transforms animal-like Ulysses (Hom. *Od*. 6.130-134) into a man for Nausicaa (Hom. *Od.* 6.234-237). A similar simile works to describe a transformation of Aeneas as well (Verg. *Aen*. 1.592-593). In these cases, Athena and Thetis are Pygmalion, and Achilles and Ulysses Galatea. Achilles is also cast as a female by Calchas' use of the passive form *raptus* (*Ach*. 1.526), situating him as a victim like Europa, Medea, or Helen.[156] Again,

[154] McNelis 2024: 379.
[155] Nuzzo 2012: 86; Bessone 2016: 188; McNelis 2024: 237.
[156] McNelis 2024: 287.

Statius exploits the paradoxical blurring between feminine and masculine in this allusion to invert the epic role of the male hero.[157]

Cross-mythic allusions can also be seen in the specific references to the power of sight. The power of sight throughout Graeco-Roman myth can also be seen in the surrounding figures of the paintings and of Statius' plot; in this instance, Calchas and Lycomedes. Both are 'sightless'; one is blind and far away, but can truly see (through Calchas' power as a seer), the other is deceived and cannot see what is in front of his eyes (*Ach*. 1. 910-915). In the wall paintings, Calchas is not present, but Lycomedes is a key figure in both inv. 9110 and inv. 116085. Lycomedes stands directly behind Achilles and Ulysses, the central point of the action, disturbance, and discovery, yet he looks out towards the distance, seemingly unaware of what is unfolding before him in the centre of his palace. He does not appear to be looking at anything specific, and thus he stands outside of the power of the gaze, rendered irrelevant in the narrative. Lycomedes is surrounded by the group of soldiers, contributing to his utter helplessness in this scene to defend his daughters. His characterisation as passive and helpless remains consistent in the *Achilleid* – helpless against Thetis' deception, helpless to respond appropriately to Deidamia's rape, helpless against wily Ulysses' deceptions and helpless to defend his home. Calchas, in the *Achilleid*, is also sightless and at points, unaware of his own immediate surroundings:

> mox igne genas et sanguine torquens
> nec socios nec castra uidet, sed caecus et absens (*Ach*. 1.516-517)
> Presently he rolls fiery bloodshot eyes, nor sees comrades and camp, he is sightless and somewhere else.

Lycomedes, characterised by his domestic setting and being surrounded by peace and young daughters, is clearly not a part of the epic world. Statius' reader is told that Lycomedes is not equipped to deal with the deception of the likes of Thetis and Ulysses, and though he can see, he is blind to the happenings around him. Calchas, on the other hand, belongs firmly in the epic realm, and mythological allusions to sight make this positioning clear. Calchas, like Tiresias (Hom. *Od*. 10.492; Call. *H*. 5.83-93; Ov. *Met*.

[157] McNelis 2024: 237.

3.332-338), Phineus (Hes. fr. 254; Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 2.177-182), Thamyris (Prop. 2.22.19), and Evenios (Hdt. 9.92-94) use their lack of sight to really see,[158] positioning grand epic vision above domestic, elegiac sight.

Collectively, all of these mythic echoes set up a powerful tension between two narrative trajectories: the eroticised delay (Elegy) – the temptation to linger in love, domesticity, and self-reflection, as represented through gaze – and heroic progress (Epic). The Skyros episode thus positions Achilles within a familiar mythic pattern: a hero poised between competing calls of heart and fate. The intertextual web of mythic allusion invites the viewer to feel the full emotional pull of the elegiac pause, even as they know from mythic precedent that epic duty will ultimately win out. Crucially, gazing, by nature, demands an extended pause. This dilemma is not unique to Achilles, and I do not suggest that this mythic episode stands alone in highlighting this heroic predicament. Rather, this collection of mythic allusions, in which elegy and epic go hand-in-hand, demonstrates the interconnected and dynamic nature of epic genre across media. Where literary allusions must be activated through verbal reference, the paintings can generate this 'intermythic' network simultaneously through gaze, gesture, and visual juxtaposition.

Section Conclusion: Images Enable Genre to Become a Dynamic Process

Some may argue that the *Achilleid*'*s* flirtation with elegy is merely an authorial idiosyncrasy; however, the visual representations from Pompeii demonstrate that this blurring of epic and elegiac genres existed as part of a broader intermedial mythic economy in which this story and others that have been alluded to were always coded elegiacally. Rather than simply preparing Achilles for epic masculinity, both text and image luxuriate in the erotic, feminine delay, although the visual medium can sustain this suspended moment without the same narrative pressure towards resolution. The intermedial dialogue undercuts a teleological reading of Achilles' return to epic norms, allowing space for a sustained elegiac subjectivity. This reveals that our traditional views on genre remain too rigid and confined to literature, and that our understanding of generic dynamics can be enriched by looking simultaneously towards literary and visual culture.

[158] McNelis 2024: 283.

The paintings of Achilles on Skyros offer a vital lens for understanding the interplay of myth, genre, and socio-political reflection in 1st century CE Rome. As we have seen throughout this section of the chapter, these images activate a dynamic network of gazes and emotional resonances that draw Achilles into an elegiac mode: he is made a spectacle rather than an actor, framed within an erotic, vulnerable, and introspective atmosphere that complicates his traditional epic persona. Yet, crucially, this transformation is never fully realised in the literary narrative. Achilles is suspended in a moment of elegiac possibility – but he is ultimately recalled to his epic destiny. The paintings, by contrast, can remain within that moment of suspension, allowing Achilles to linger indefinitely between erotic and martial identities. Love is sacrificed for epic duty, just as in the mythic analogues of Ulysses, Aeneas, and others. However, the strong undercurrent of elegiac emotion does not exist to set up the sole triumph of epic. This is not the full elegisation of epic, or the 'epicisation' of elegy,[159] but rather the celebration of both genres existing as one – highlighting the lover warrior/warrior lover.[160] Recognising this movement profoundly changes how we approach Statius' *Achilleid*. The poem is not simply an "unfinished epic", nor merely a playful interruption of epic tradition. Rather, it is a literary counterpart to the visual culture of the late first century CE, participating in the same broader cultural concerns that we see reflected in the wall paintings of Pompeii.

This analysis so far has remained largely within the representational world of text and image: the looks exchanged by mythological figures, the reflective surfaces through which Achilles encounters himself, and the other myths recalled through these visual patterns. Yet these gazes require another participant – the person looking at the painting. The final stage of the argument therefore turns outward from represented acts of viewing to the spectator whose own movement, memory, and visual choices activate these connections.

[159] O'Rourke 2012: 399; Dalzell 1980; Benediktson 1985.
[160] Both Heslin 2005: 241 and Russell 2014: 113 comment on the eroticism of the moment that depicts Achilles as both lover and warrior; cf. McNelis 2024: 362.

EXPANDING THE GAZE: BEYOND THE PAINTING

In considering the Roman 'elegisation' of epic through visual media, the role of the viewer's gaze becomes a critical mechanism. Wall paintings (such as those depicting Achilles on Skyros) are not passive illustrations of myth, but active emotional technologies that enlist the viewer into the narrative experience. These paintings transform mythic action into emotional introspection – the heroic becomes vulnerable, desire almost supersedes destiny, and the viewer becomes an implicated participant in the myth's affective drama. The gaze, both of the figures within the paintings and of the viewer, functions as the central device for reframing epic material into an elegiac mode.

Within Wall Paintings inv. 116085 & 9110

The Achilles on Skyros paintings from Pompeii exemplify this importance of viewing with particular force. As this moment when the myth is already charged with gender instability, erotic tension and loss, and the delay of heroic action, it serves as an ideal case study for understanding how visual structures guide emotional reading practices. The paintings invite and structure the viewer's gaze through a dynamic and layered engagement with the figures depicted – an effect that can be highlighted through David Petrain's concept of *gramma meson* viewing techniques.[161]

According to the *gramma meson* model, Roman viewers could engage with complex images by beginning at the centre and spiralling outwards toward the periphery. This centrifugal mode encourages viewers to prioritise the nucleus of the scene before moving toward its broader narrative frame. In the case of inv. 9110 and inv. 116085, the viewer's eye is drawn immediately to Achilles. Achilles stands at the visual and thematic centre, caught in a suspended moment of exposure and indecision. As the viewer's gaze radiates outward, it encounters Lycomedes positioned above Achilles – a passive, almost effaced figure, whose inertia contrasts with the forward momentum of Achilles. This directional movement of the gaze underscores the hero's pull towards his epic destiny, even as the painting captures him at the brink of elegiac hesitation. Further outward, Deidamia and Ulysses anchor the paintings' lower and lateral edges, each embodying opposing

[161] Which he applies to the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (Petrain 2014: 73) and which I discuss in Chapter One.

symbolic poles. Deidamia works as a visual tether to Skyros, the domestic, feminised world he must leave behind, and Ulysses, in contrast, is an assertive force symbolising Troy, grasping Achilles' arm and trying to meet his eyes, fixing him with a commanding stare. The network of gazes – Achilles looking back toward Deidamia even as he moves physically toward Ulysses – dramatises an emotional and narrative impasse: the tug-of-war between elegiac desire and epic destiny. The viewer is given the impression that his course of action could be either to remain on Skyros with Deidamia and their child, or to go to Troy with Ulysses and Diomedes. Likewise, the viewer's gaze is encouraged to linger and to oscillate between Achilles' possibilities, rather than progressing straightforwardly toward an epic *telos*.

This *gramma meson* viewing method – from centre to periphery, and in a circular pattern, mirrors the circularity of the mythic episode proposed by Heslin, who rejects that the *Achilleid* was an incomplete work, and makes the convincing suggestion that the *Achilleid* was in fact a completed narrative – "Statius' promise was a bluff, and this, his final masterpiece."[162] The portion of the *Achilleid* we do have was certainly ready for publication, and perhaps already in circulation. Heslin argues that, from the extant text alone, it is clear that Statius could never have run through the life of the hero in its entirety, and thus he must never have really intended to do so. Furthermore, at the end of the preface, Statius does not start at the very beginning as promised – he drops the reader *in medias res* instead.[163] This structure aligns also with the *Aeneid*, which launches *in medias res*, and covers just a short section of the life of Aeneas.[164] In the earlier *Siluae*, Statius writes to Vibius that Achilles has stalled at the first turning point of a chariot race (*Silv.* 4.7.21-24: *torpor est nostris sine te Camenis, / tardius sueto uenit ipse Thymbrae / rector et primis meus ecce metis / haeret Achilles*). Victoria Rimell sees this as a mischievous allusion to the non-ending given to the *Achilleid* – Achilles will forever turn in loops in the Roman *circus*.[165]

[162] Heslin 2005: 62.
[163] Heslin 2005: 82.
[164] Hardie 2005: 93.
[165] Rimell 2015: 253; Abad Del Vecchio 2024: 32.

At the end of the *Achilleid*, Achilles concludes the story of his childhood with "my mother knows the rest."[166] Heslin describes Achilles as thereby disappearing "into his mother's womb."[167] Having narrated his life backwards through remembered and second-hand events, Achilles finally reaches the point where he can no longer remember, and only Thetis can supply the remainder of his story. Indeed, *mater* is the final word of the poem (*Ach*. 2.167). The metaphor is more suggestive when considering Thetis' identity as a sea-nymph. Achilles' return to his mother's account also coincides with his movement to the sea, the realm of his mother. With this, the *Achilleid* enforces its own circularity and the idea of Achilles' continual rebirth in this Romanised account of the mythic cycle. This Achilles does not get to Troy – as he enters upon the sea (the sphere of his mother) he hands back to her the narrative reins and metaphorically returns to his childhood. Thetis herself in the poem acknowledges the troubles ahead: "the dangers have moved towards the final turning point": Achilles' death at Troy:[168] (*Ach*. 1.257-258: *quin et metuenda propinquant / tempora et extremis admota pericula metis*).[169] The recurrence of *meta* imagery is significant. In the *Siluae (Silv*. 4.7.21-24), Achilles remains fixed at the *primis … metis*, the first turning-posts of the race; here, the dangers of Troy lie at the *extremis … metis*, its final turning-posts. Achilles' mythic trajectory is thus imagined as a circuit extending between first and final *metae*. Yet the extant poem never allows him to reach that final post. Instead, as he moves towards Troy, his retrospective narrative turns back towards his mother, returning him figuratively to the beginning of his life. The poem therefore contains Achilles within a closed circuit in which forward movement towards epic death is simultaneously a movement back towards his maternal origin and rebirth. The close juxtaposition *metuenda … metis (Ach*. 1.257-258) further draws attention to the latter term, associating the final turning-post of Achilles' course with the dangers to be feared there. The end of the poem, then, signposts both Achilles' imminent death but also, as Heslin notes, his return into his mother on his way to Troy – a circular narrative of rebirth within a closed circuit.[170]

[166] Stat. *Ach*. 2.167.
[167] Heslin 2005: 63.
[168] Abad Del Vecchio 2024: 29.
[169] Translation here by Julene Abad Del Vecchio (2024: 32-33).
[170] Abad Del Vecchio 2024: 32-33.

This textual circular narrative can also be applied to the text and images through further study of the circular shield, visible at the centre of the paintings and one of the first things to catch a viewer's eye (Figure 14). Within the paintings, the shield symbolises Achilles' martial future at Troy, but the reflection of Chiron and young Achilles on the same shield functions to contain Achilles' narrative to the early part of his life. The viewer is reminded of Achilles' upbringing; we can visually see his time spent on Skyros, but his departure with Ulysses and Diomedes to Aulis to the right of the scene is cut off, and we are looped back visually to the past with Chiron and Mt Pelion. The miniature reflection functions like a type of mise en abyme, in which the embedded scene is a microcosm of the larger narrative, serving to make reflection perceptible.[171] This scene creates a sense of infinite reflection and circularity of the narrative. Though the shield within the *Achilleid* does not feature the same reflection, Statius' overall narrative – which begins with Chiron and Achilles, progresses to Skyros and the intrusion by Ulysses and Diomedes, and ends with Achilles' prolonged explanation of his upbringing with Chiron (*Ach*. 2.86-167), perfectly echoes the structure set out by the Pompeiian wall paintings. Statius' shield functions similarly, in that the reflection of Skyrian Achilles (blush spots) holds Achilles in this moment and forces a delay in his progression to the epic and martial Achilles (represented also on the shield with the blood spots). These viewing structures hold the spectator's gaze within Achilles' moment of uncertainty rather than allowing it to proceed directly towards his epic *telos*. Just as Achilles' gaze is held by Deidamia or the shield, the viewer's own gaze is held by the image itself, drawing both into the same temporal suspension between elegiac attachment and epic departure.

The individual painting structures the viewer's gaze internally; however, this represents only one level of Roman viewing. These images were encountered not as isolated panels but as elements within decorated rooms and houses. The next step is therefore to expand the visual field from the single painting to the domestic program and to ask how adjacency, movement, and spatial juxtaposition shaped the meanings available to the viewer.

[171] Braund 2017: 171.

Broader Viewing Context

Importantly, the paintings found on the walls in Pompeii should not be viewed in isolation. In domestic spaces, Achilles on Skyros paintings are often found alongside other mythical paintings, creating a complicated network of myth with multivalent interpretations. These visual pairs or triads of scenes can further disrupt our understanding of genre and the various intended meanings of myth within space. This spatial arrangement invites associative reading: Achilles is placed into a broader matrix of myths about ambiguous masculinity, epic heroism and erotically charged gazes. This is particularly notable given the nature of Roman 'reading' – taking place in areas of the house richly decorated with mythological scenes – potentially at odds or with strong allusions to what is being read aloud. These competing cues challenge readers to hold multiple Achilles' in mind simultaneously. The *Achilleid* can be reread not just within the Trojan cycle, but alongside other myths of visual entrapment, transformation, and seduction. The image thus opens up a non-linear, thematically allusive network that can destabilise the epic heroic trajectory. The following sections will focus on how the painted medium and domestic painting programs allow different myths to 'bleed' into each other visually, and how ancient viewers/readers experienced myth through spatial, visual, narrative entanglement. This can also be mapped onto Statius' use of intertext and allusion – i.e., the poetic equivalent of 'adjacent wall scenes'.

Previous work on the combinations of paintings in Roman houses has suggested that paintings offered room-specific intellectual programs to the viewer, that could not be generalised beyond an individual house.[172] However, given that we are able to see identical pairings of works across houses in Pompeii,[173] I argue that painting programs can demonstrate broader social meaning that extends from house to house.[174] While paintings are of originally Greek myths, the juxtaposition of these myths and the subsequent programmatic messages are Roman,[175] giving us insight in the Roman cultural psyche and Roman understandings of visuality, myth, and genre. Furthermore,

[172] Fredrick 1995: 274.
[173] For example, the matching paintings and mosaics of Achilles in the House of the Dioscuri and the neighbouring House of Apollo.
[174] Wallace Hadrill 1988; Fredrick 1995: 275.
[175] Barringer 1994: 166; Thompson 1960: 77.

decorative collections of paintings at Pompeii do not seem to be grouped based on linear narrative, but rather they are extracted from different moments within Achilles' narrative cycle and juxtaposed.[176] These arrangements can be viewed both as individual images but also come together with the other images in the room, which begin to function as a cohesive hermeneutic field. This mode of viewing recalls the *Tabulae Iliacae* discussed in Chapter One, where meaning similarly emerges through the viewer's freedom to combine and recombine adjacent scenes in different sequences, rather than through a single linear narrative progression. These fields of images create a kind of 'visual polyphony' in which the conscious juxtaposition of images creates unspoken yet unmissable connections that texts cannot implicitly so clearly make. This arrangement can be harmonious in its theme, and yet disruptive in its messaging. How a viewer may choose, or be guided, to view the paintings was likely influenced by the original function of the room in which the paintings were situated.

The House of Ubonus

The precise function of room u is uncertain, but its size and position between the tablinum and peristyle may suggest that it formed part of an 'entertainment suite', making its decorative program particularly relevant to the experience of visitors to the house. These areas tended to be the most well-decorated, with the purpose of impressing guests of the house.[177] The recent renovations done in this section of the house also suggest that this area was kept more up to date for the benefit of visitors.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted that the *Tabulae Iliacae* were housed in various elite villas throughout Rome and I made the argument that owners within an elite circle likely visited one another's houses and could interact with one another's tablets in the context of their own – as an exclusive set of collector's items. A similar proposal can be made here for an elite network of friendships in Pompeii which allowed for the viewing of one another's mythic frescoes, resulting in subsequent intellectual, comparative discussions. Some scholars certainly may have dismissed the visually harmonious yet

[176] Thompson 1960: 40.
[177] Valladares 2012: 330; Clarke 1998: 157; Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 52-57.

juxtaposed ensembles within these houses as "an example of conspicuous consumption among the Campanian nouveaux riches",[178] and such a dismissal recalls Horsfall's characterisation of the *Tabulae Iliacae* as "expensive rubbish".[179] However, I contend otherwise. In both cases, the emphasis upon conspicuous display risks obscuring the intellectual and interpretative possibilities offered by these objects within elite domestic culture. The dynamics of genre, gaze and viewing, the role of circularity and containment, the juxtaposition of images to create a visual web of myth, and the role of viewer as a moving body invited ancient viewers to experience this myth cycle more immersively than experiencing text alone. Scholes and Kellogg defined narrative as literary works with two characteristics: a story and a storyteller.[180] Within visual narrative, the viewer takes on a particularly active role as a supplementary storyteller. The world created by the hermeneutic field of the room is created by the artist, but the viewer is free to choose how and in what sequence to experience it.[181] Furthermore, individual viewers will bring their own level of mythic knowledge into this manufactured space, ultimately dictating how they will experience this immersion into the mythic narrative. This freedom to interpret myth based on mythic episodes surrounding it is able to inform our reading of the *Achilleid* with more sophistication.

An example of this Roman programmatic painting comes from the House of the Ubonus. Considered together, the three paintings of room u form a clear visual program: Achilles on Skyros (B) occupies the wall opposite the entrance, flanked by Thetis carrying arms to Achilles (A) and Thetis at the workshop of Hephaestus (C) (Figure 15):

[178] Bergmann 1994: 255.
[179] Horsfall 1994: 80.
[180] In Brilliant 1984: 16; Scholes and Kellogg 1966: 2.
[181] Brilliant 1984: 16.

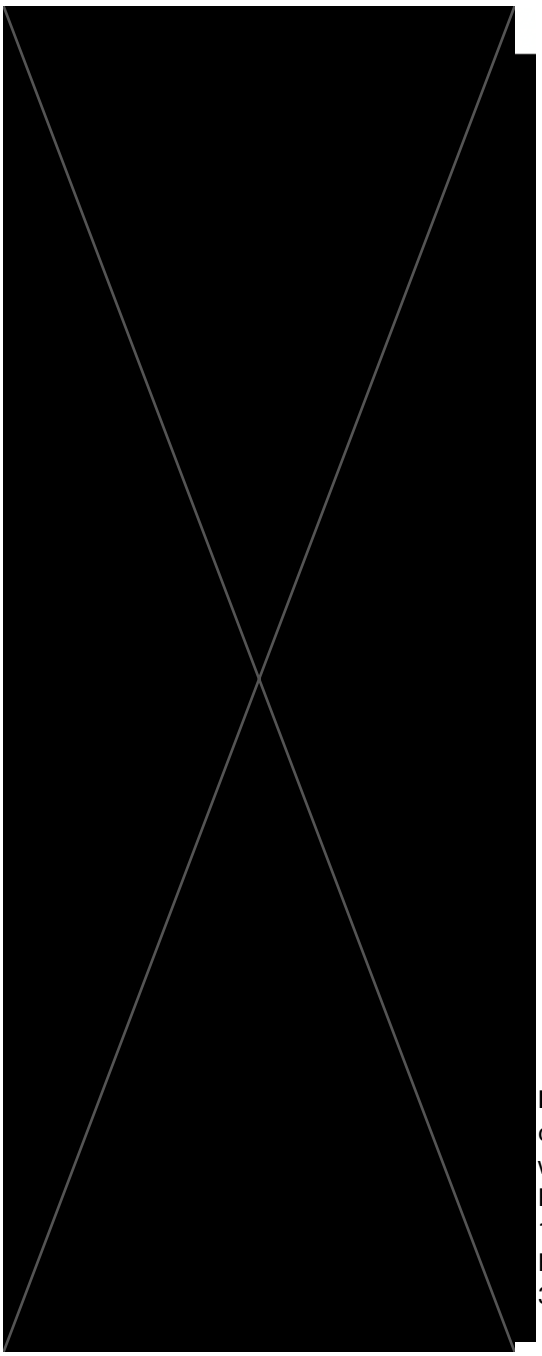

Figure 15: Achilles cycle from room u, House IX.5.2 (House of Ubonus), Pompeii, first century CE. Frescoes. (A) Left wall: Thetis carrying the arms of Achilles*, in situ*. (B) Rear/north wall: Achilles discovered on Skyros, MANN, inv. 116085. (C) Right wall: Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus*, in situ*. Reproduced from Thompson 1960-61: 36-77, fig. 1A-C.

This order across walls does not correspond correctly with the narrative time set out by the myth.[182] Instead, this contained mythic narrative set out across the room turns the Arming of Achilles into a proleptic "symbolic epitome of events leading to his fulfilment as a hero."[183] And Achilles on Skyros, through its placement between these scenes, is reinforced as an event physically *in medias res*. Brilliant notes that this anachronistic

[182] Brilliant 1984: 67.
[183] Brilliant 1984: 68.

pictorial cycle has its own narrative validity, with a clearly defined beginning (B) and middle (C and then A). The end of Achilles' story, Brilliant asserts, is so well known that it has not been included here.[184] He sees the inclusion of the Achilles on Skyros image as the main panel as a symbolic epitome of the events leading to his fulfilment as a hero. The underlying construct in the ensemble of panels is, therefore, proleptic.[185] However, we can complicate this viewing arrangement further still. Brilliant sees an A-B-C structure across the images (the narrative is visually represented B-C-A), forcing the viewer to engage with the artist's games of non-chronology. The B-C-A structure, from middle to end and back to the beginning again reinforces the *in medias res* narrative as well as the circularity of the plot, as crafted by both Statius and the images. Not only does the arrangement allude to Achilles' epic *telos*, but it also precludes the viewer from seeing this conclusion, forcing them to experience only Achilles' elegiac prelude to the war. Heroic Achilles cannot exist without the erotic Achilles that came before and resided on Skyros; this version is at the very heart of the epic hero he becomes, suggesting through Achilles' representation that elegy and epic were inseparable in these visual narratives.

Additionally, a frame-by-frame (A-B-C) style of viewing could be applied to the individual painting (inv. 116085) as well as the collective whole. The ways in which this could be applied to the painting is numerous. The most obvious example is a left to right reading: A = Deidamia and Skyros; B = Achilles and his struggle between the two realms; C = Ulysses and Troy. However, one could view diagonally from the top left-hand corner to the lower right: A = the trumpeter kickstarting the scene; B = Achilles' response; C = the future towards which he moves (Figures 16 and 17):

[184] Brilliant 1984: 67.
[185] Brilliant 1984: 68.

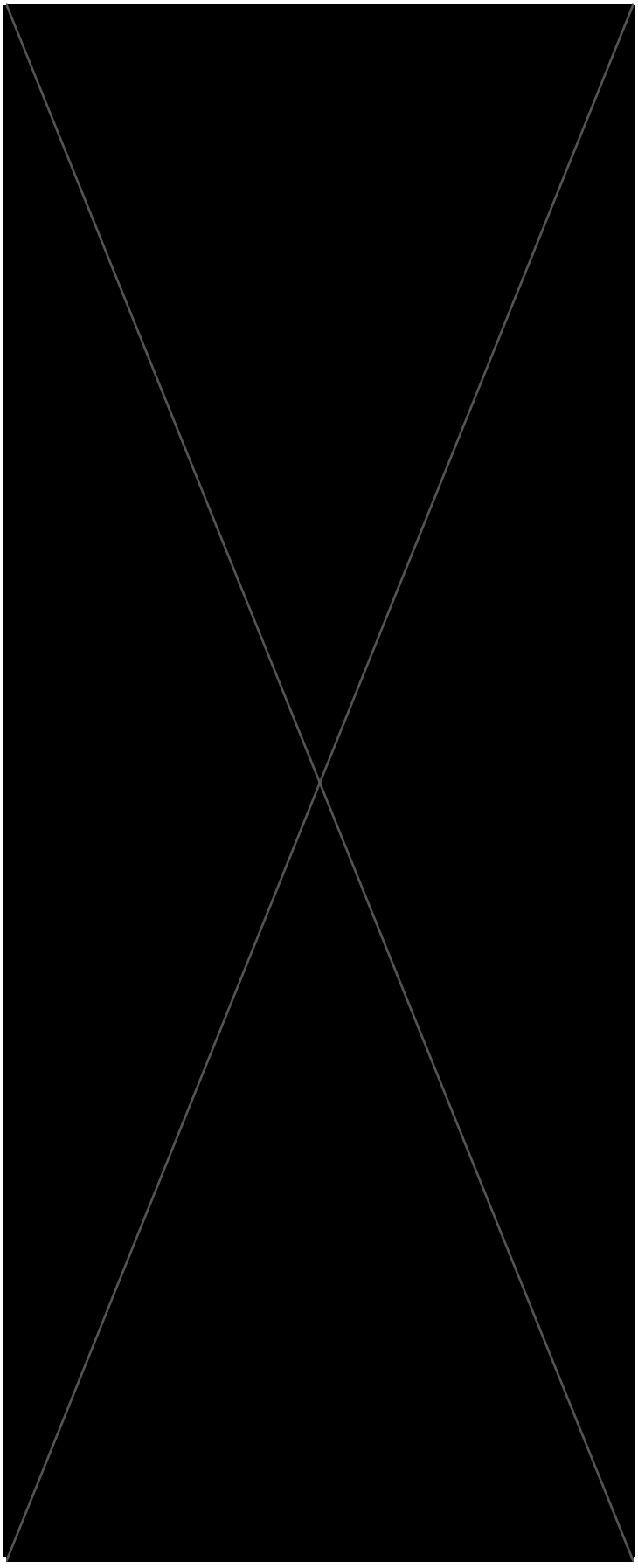

Figure 16: A-B-C reading model applied horizontally to inv. 116085. Adapted and annotated by author.

Figure 17: A-B-C reading model applied diagonally to inv. 116085. Adapted and annotated by author.

The first of these options allows a viewer to zoom in on the more erotic elements of the scene – Deidamia left behind, Achilles' hesitant gaze back, and the loss of their love. Yet the second order of viewing allows a viewer to cut out the women and focus on only the epic elements in the scene – the clamour of war, the violence of Ulysses and Diomedes seizing Achilles, and finally, the empty space signifying their departure to Aulis.

The presence of Thetis in both of the surrounding images is also significant. The central image (Achilles on Skyros) is surrounded, or bookended, by scenes containing Thetis – in the workshop of Hephaestus and providing Achilles with the new armour. In both of these scenes, she aids her son and intervenes to ensure his protection. Though neither of these episodes occur within the *Achilleid*, the presence of Thetis notably also encircles Statius' entire narrative. After the proem, dedicated to Domitian, the poem opens with Thetis' alarm at Paris and her intentions to sink his ship and prevent Achilles' involvement in the war (*Ach*. 1.20-51). The text also ends with Thetis and a focus on her role as mother: *scit cetera mater* (*Ach*. 2. 167). Just as the shield and Chiron create points of circularity within the *Achilleid*, so too does Thetis frame Statius' narrative through her presence at both its beginning and end. Read alongside the surrounding wall paintings, this literary framing finds a striking visual analogue: Achilles is similarly enclosed by images of his mother and her protective interventions.

Broader Viewing Context: House of the Dioscuri

Unlike room u of the House of Ubonus, which focussed on a set of three, the paintings within the House of the Dioscuri, seem more concerned with duality. The house was named for the paired Dioscuri paintings,[186] one on each wall of the *fauces* at the entrance to the house (Figure 10). After passing through the entry hall, the space opens up to the atrium. To follow the main axis of the house, the atrium then opens into the tablinum, directly opposite the entry hall, where two paintings of Achilles – one depicting Achilles on Skyros (inv. 9110; 98.7cm x 148cm), and the other the Wrath of Achilles (MANN inv. 9104).[187] The two paired paintings of Achilles perfectly echo the juxtaposition of the two

[186] Attributed inventively to the Dioscuri Painter: Richardson 1955: 116.
[187] Trimble 2002: 228.

Dioscuri on either side of the entryway. Both brothers hold their horse's reins in his right hand, with a long spear in the left. Both wear *chlamydes* around their shoulders and *piloi* decorated with stars – representative of their dual roles in the mortal and immortal worlds.[188] Immediately upon entering this house, the themes of duality, pairs, and binaries is made clear. The tablinum, which had undergone renovation in the years prior to the eruption, was the most richly painted room of the house. It also lies in the centre of a major sequence of rooms in the house, positioned between the atrium and the peristyle. Along the central axis of the house, the set of paired images of Achilles are directly in line with the Dioscuri paintings. The location of these paintings – in the tablinum and within view of the atrium – suggests the significant contemporary cultural capital held by these images. Notably, the atrium of the House of the Dioscuri also contains a Republican era painting of Thetis bringing the arms of Achilles.[189] The two paintings of Achilles in the tablinum are linked both thematically and visually and it is clear that they were designed from the outset to be seen in terms of the other (Figure 18).

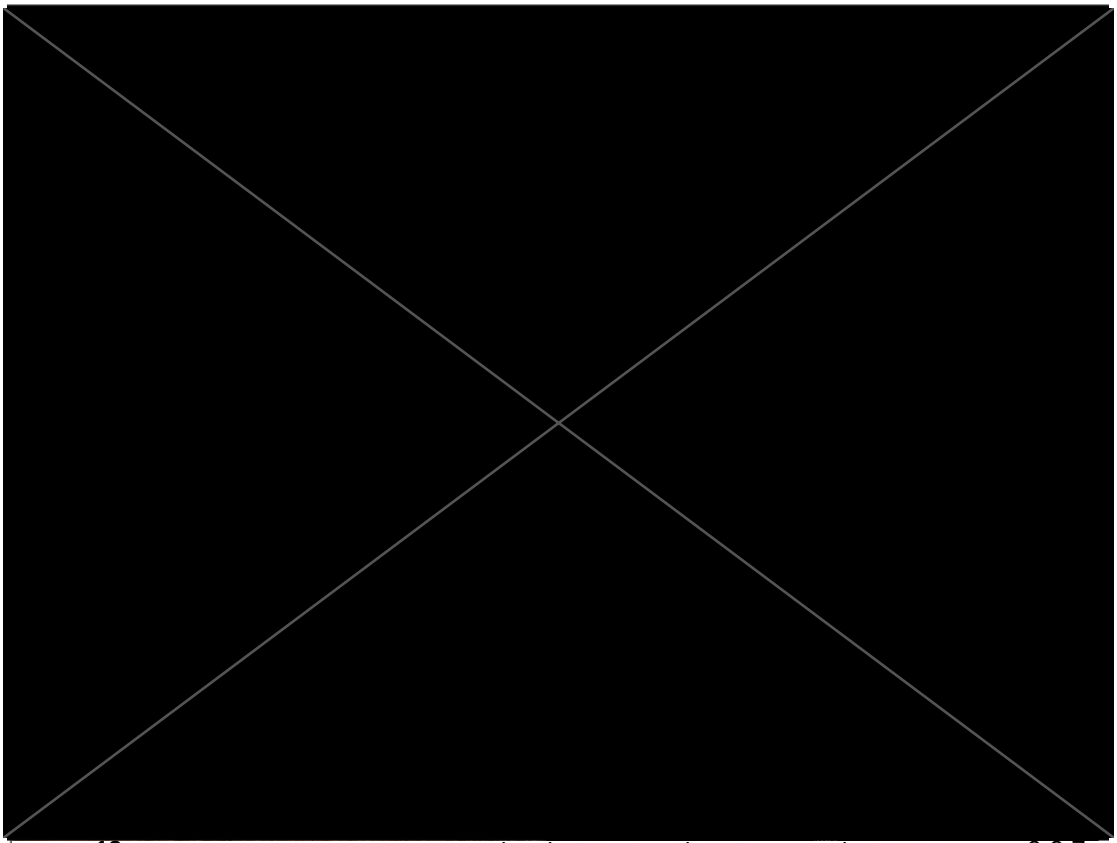

Figure 18: Opposing scenes painted from the *tablinum* of the House of the Dioscuri, I.9.6-7, Pompeii. Left: "Achilles on Skyros", MANN inv. 9110, south wall. Right: "Achilles drawing his sword against Agamemnon, restrained by Athena", MANN inv. 9104, north wall.

[188] Trimble 2002: 228.
[189] Richardson 1955: 29.

The existence of the identical pairing of images in the House of Apollo (situated on the Via di Mercurio like the House of the Dioscuri, with both mosaics remaining *in situ*) corroborates this fact (Figure 19).

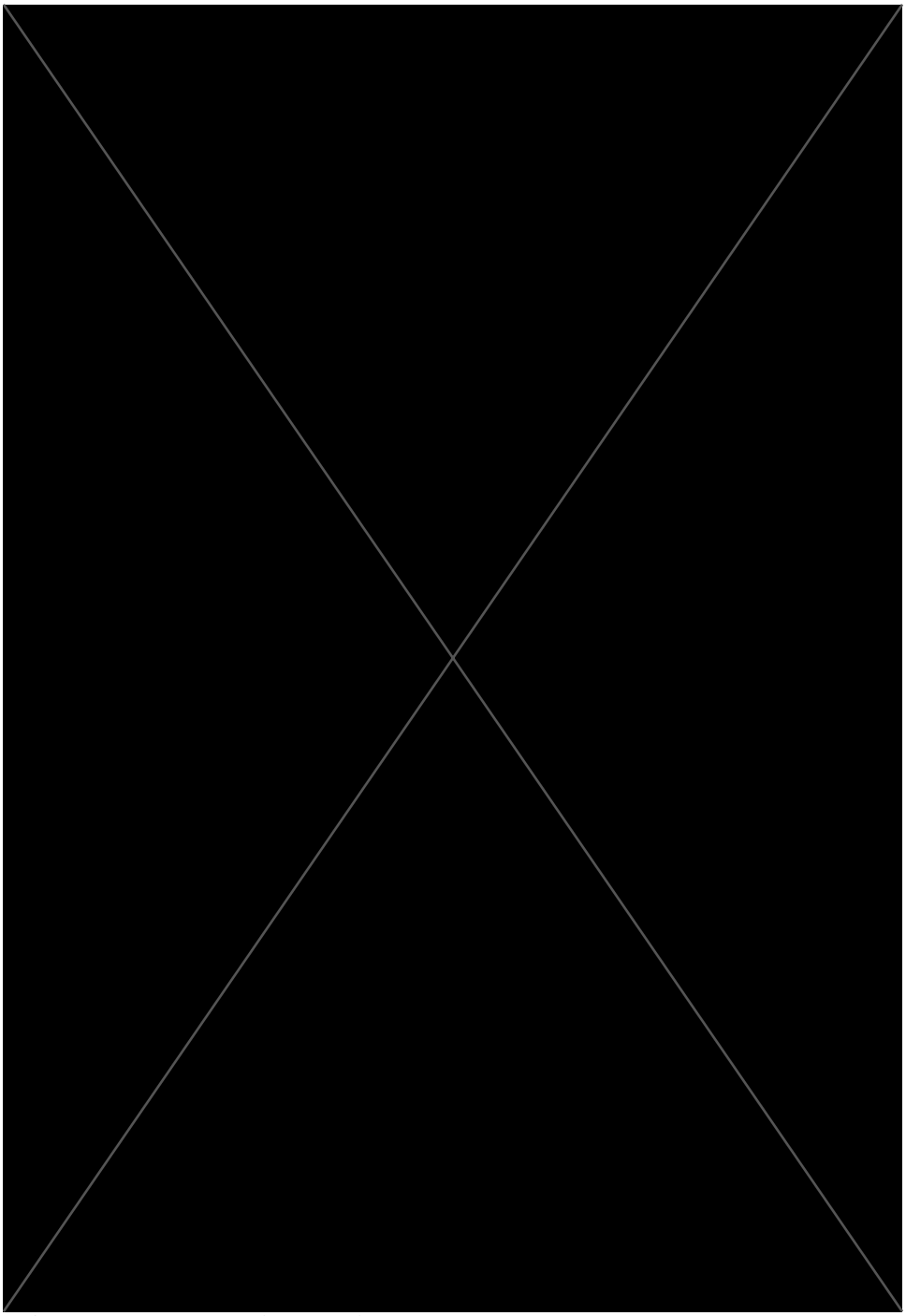

Figure 19: Corresponding Mosaics found from the House of Apollo (VI.7.23), Pompeii. "Achilles on Skyros", from the exterior east wall of cubiculum on south side of window; *in situ*. Photograph by 'Mentnafunangann', CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa_di_Apollo_%28Pompei%29_WLM_023.JPG
Below: "Achilles confronting Agamemnon"; from the south side of the garden portico, MANN, inv. 10006. Photograph by 'Jebulon', CC0 1.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Achilles_against_Agamemnon,_mosaic_(from_Pompeii)#/media/File:Achilles_Agamemnon_Pompei_mosaic_NAMNaples_10006.jpg

The juxtaposition here is also clear – one image featuring Achilles caught between girl and man, the other his violent challenging of the king of men. The apparent visual links between the paintings are described already in extensive detail by Trimble;[190] both Achilles feature an "explosive stride" forwards, in the first instance towards Ulysses and the arms, in the second toward Agamemnon with these same arms in hand. In both images, Achilles grasps an identical sword, proportionately too small for him – echoed in the *Achilleid*, where Statius explains that as Achilles transforms from girl to man, he seems to grow, and the weapons inexplicably seem to shrink in his hands - (*iam clipeus breuiorque manu consumitur hasta / (mira fides*): *Ach.* 1.879-880).[191] In both images, Achilles is being physically grabbed or restrained, either by Diomedes and Ulysses, or Minerva. The garments that have fallen off Achilles at Skyros have made way for his depiction in the heroic nude in the second image. In the Wrath image (inv. 9104), Minerva holds a spear to reflect the one held by Ulysses on the opposite wall. She also carries a shield, seemingly identical to the shield that features so centrally in the Skyros scene. She now replaces Deidamia and acts as the female figure who mitigates Achilles' response to crisis. Both images contain a king (Lycomedes and Agamemnon) – both of whom are rendered powerless by Achilles' transcendence and transgression (of both gender and social expectation).

As in the House of Ubonus, the pairing of these two images seems to suggest a proleptic "symbolic epitome of events leading to his fulfilment as a hero."[192] The anger of Agamemnon is foreshadowed in the *Achilleid* (*Ach.* 1.36), and the paintings visibly link Achilles on Skyros to Achilles' Homeric future – in which he quarrels with Agamemnon. Yet, the pairing of images does not show a linear progression from Achilles on Skyros to Troy.

The House of the Dioscuri requires a viewer to enter via the paired Dioscuri paintings, travel through the atrium, and into the tablinum at the atrium's rear, making visual links between the Dioscuri and the paired representations of Achilles. Through this

[190] Trimble 2002: 240
[191] He is noticeably larger than Ulysses, too.
[192] Brilliant 1984: 68.

arrangement, the idea of duality is introduced. Duality is prefaced and reinforced by the presence of the Dioscuri – the broader theme of the house. The brothers, one human and the other immortal, born from the opposing twin eggs of Leda, symbolise this idea of pairs and binaries, and thus highlight the duality of Achilles – namely that of love and war, or elegy and epic. The Dioscuri and Achilles are linked yet more closely – they become brothers-in-law with Achilles eventual marriage to Helen in the afterlife, and links through the Dioscuri, Peleus, and the Argo are made in the *Achilleid* (Ach. 1.63-65). Here, Chiron recounts a story to Thetis in which he sees the Argo sail by. He is cut off by the approach of Achilles, and he ends with the word *uidi* – applying here both to Peleus in his story and Achilles in the present moment.

In the House of the Dioscuri, Achilles is visually depicted simultaneously as both the feminised, elegiac and the Homeric epic versions of himself. Both of these parts of Achilles are linked by the shield-as-mirror. Achilles is literally unable to inhabit the world of one without direct reference to the other, and the viewer is able to see epic and elegiac Achilles together, physically embodying the duality of genre.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that Roman literary culture cannot be fully understood without studying it in conjunction with the visual world in which it was embedded and experienced. By reading Statius' *Achilleid* alongside Pompeiian wall paintings of Achilles on Skyros, I have shown how visuality, particularly the dynamics of gaze, offers a powerful interpretative tool for unpacking intermedial engagements with myth, genre, and narrative authority in Roman culture. These interconnections challenge modern assumptions about the parallel realms of text and image and suggest that Roman audiences experienced myth through a richly integrated visual-literary environment. Through an analysis of visual tropes such as mirrors, shields, and acts of looking within both paintings and poetry, this chapter has demonstrated how the gaze functions as a mechanism that cuts across media, revealing layers of meaning not always accessible in the textual literature alone. This approach allows us to trace the ways in which Roman myths were not simply retold in different media but actively reimagined through intermedial dialogue. The gaze, then, is not only thematic but structural – informing how

media reflect, frame, and even destabilise one another. In this context, the *Achilleid* emerges as a text that is not merely "optical" in the Ovidian tradition, but one that participates in a broader visual culture that predates its literary antecedents. The Pompeiian paintings underscore themes such as gender and genre ambiguity, as well as bringing to life a broader 'intermythic' web which Statius inherits but also transforms. The variations between visual and textual versions, such as the absence of Chiron's reflection in Statius' shield scene, reveal a sophisticated mode of intermedial exchange, one that not only demonstrates simple replication but also broader thematic resonance. Furthermore, the gaze of the viewer becomes a critical mechanism in understanding the elegisation of Latin epic in in both literary and visual media. Viewing methods and the structure of the sources, along with the domestic painting arrangements make the elegiac and epic Achilles inseparable, implicating the spectator in the intermedial, intermythic, and intergeneric cultural landscape.

This chapter has shown that the generic instability of Statius' *Achilleid* was not confined to literary poetics but formed part of a broader visual culture in which Achilles could be perceived of simultaneously as epic hero and elegiac object. The Pompeiian paintings make that instability visible through gaze, erotic exposure, reflective surfaces, and domestic juxtaposition, while the viewer's own movement between figures, images, and mythic associations becomes integral to the production of meaning. Read alongside Statius, these visual traditions suggest that genre in Roman culture could be constructed and recognised across media rather than residing solely within literary form. The particular contribution of this case study, then, is to show how visual practices did not merely illustrate generic hybridity but actively participated in making it culturally legible.

The next chapter will build on this thesis by examining a case study in which the interaction between text and image is less overt, demonstrating that visuality informed literary practice at a sustained cultural level. Rather than depending upon direct correspondence between a particular text and image, the chapter shows how intermedial analysis can illuminate broader cultural structures shared across literary and visual media. Chapter Three will take Philostratus' *Heroicus* and contemporary representations of Protesilaus to examine the intermedial construction of the illusion of

authority. It argues that literary and visual representations are mutually constitutive in shaping the apparent credibility of claims about the heroic past, as verbal testimony, material presence, and the authority of sight become increasingly entangled.

CHAPTER THREE: Conjuring Protesilaus: *Enargeia* and the Illusion of Autopsy in Philostratus' *Heroicus* and the Iconography of Protesilaus

INTRODUCTION

Crede mihi, plus est, quam quod uideatur, imago (Ov. *Her*. 13.155.)
Believe me, the image is more than it appears.

The re-evaluation and rewriting of Homer was a hallmark of Greek Imperial literature. Lucian's *True Stories*, Dio Chrysostom's *Trojan Oration*, and even Arrian's *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea* all reconfigure the Trojan War or its heroes in some way. Philostratus is no exception, and his *Heroicus* is cast as an extended exercise in setting the story straight. Throughout this dialogue, the Vinedresser (a local vine-grower and devotee of Protesilaus who tends the land around the hero's sanctuary) repeatedly challenges the authority of Homeric tradition by appealing instead to more immediate forms of visual evidence and knowledge: eyewitness testimony, statues, sacred landscapes, cult sites, and the continued presence of the heroes themselves. Central to this endeavour is Protesilaus, whose posthumous appearances provide the Vinedresser with what he presents as privileged access to the true events of the Trojan War. The Vinedresser claims not merely to know about Protesilaus, but to have seen him, spoken with him, and inhabited the landscape through which the hero continues to make his presence felt.

This chapter argues that the significance of these appeals to visual and material evidence lies not simply in their purported authority, but in the way that the Vinedresser mobilises them to construct the illusion of autopsy, or direct experience. The *Heroicus* is a particularly revealing example of the embedded intermediality of the Greek Imperial cultural environment, and Philostratus repeatedly brings verbal and visual modes of representation into contact. His engagement with the visual traditions surrounding Protesilaus is especially significant. The Vinedresser's account of the hero draws upon his established iconography alongside broader Graeco-Roman assumptions concerning the authority of sight, the condition of statues, the possibility of epiphany, and the value

of autopsy for belief. These associations provide the cultural and interpretative framework through which his extraordinary story seems to be made plausible.

At the centre of this process is *enargeia*. The Vinedresser combines appeals to visual evidence with the rhetorical techniques of vivid description in order to produce for the Phoenician an experience analogous to direct seeing. The Phoenician himself has no immediate access to Protesilaus and does not witness the encounters upon which the Vinedresser's authority depends. Instead, he receives them through language. Through the Vinedresser's verbal reconstruction of the hero, however, he is encouraged to experience a kind of second-hand, personal autopsy;[1] he is made to feel that he has seen what he has only been told. Philostratus thus exploits the long-established association between sight and truth while simultaneously demonstrating the persuasive capacity of verbal representation. The Vinedresser does not simply tell the Phoenician about Protesilaus, but he constructs the conditions under which the Phoenician can imagine that he has encountered him.

This process is made possible by the cultural knowledge that both characters and readers bring to the dialogue. Ancient audiences approached the *Heroicus* with pre-existing assumptions about statues, hero cult, sacred landscape, epiphany, and the capacity of particular places and objects to mediate access to divine or heroic presence. As Deborah Steiner has argued of the relationship between texts and objects more broadly, it is often impossible to understand the literary deployment of an artwork without some knowledge of contemporary images: what they looked like, how they functioned, and what they were believed capable of doing.[2] The *Heroicus* similarly registers and manipulates a material reality in which cult statues and sacred monuments were part of the lived landscape.

Yet, throughout this reading, the Vinedresser's account seems faintly ridiculous to Philostratus' reader. Although the Vinedresser presents his arguments with confidence,

[1] Alcock 2004: 159.
[2] Steiner 2001: xi.

his claims often verge on the absurd. To Philostratus' reader, the repeated insistence that statues or visual artefacts authenticate historical truth, coupled with the extraordinary premise that a long-dead hero regularly converses with a local farmer, seems incredible. This tension raises an important question about textual interpretation: why does the Vinedresser's account seem implausible at all? The answer, I argue, lies not exclusively within the text itself but also in the cultural knowledge that readers bring to the text**.** Ancient readers approached the *Heroicus* with their own knowledge of, and pre-conceived experiences with, statues, hero cults, sacred landscapes, and the visual culture of the empire. These cultural expectations shaped their interpretation of the dialogue, enabling them simultaneously to recognise the persuasive force of the Vinedresser's appeals to visual evidence and to appreciate the irony with which Philostratus presents them. The reader's understanding therefore depends upon an intermedial framework in which text and image are mutually constitutive. The *Heroicus* assumes familiarity with a visual landscape that exists beyond its own pages, and it is this shared cultural experience that allows Philostratus' satire of visual authority to emerge. Philostratus assumes an audience sufficiently familiar with these visual conventions to recognise the incongruities in the Vinedresser's account. The same intermedial knowledge that makes his story convincing therefore also makes its absurdity visible to the reader.

James Porter has drawn attention to the extraordinary prominence of statues throughout the *Heroicus* and to the dialogue's sustained engagement with ekphrasis, Homeric authority, and the instabilities of representation.[3] Yet Philostratus' interest in visual representations is not an isolated eccentricity. Statuary recurs throughout Imperial Greek literature as a means of negotiating questions of beauty, authority, memory, presence, and interpretation. Lucian's *Imagines* (3-6), for example, invokes celebrated sculptures as aesthetic standards through which a living woman is described, while Favorinus in Dio Chrysostom's *Corinthian Oration* (37.22-28*)* famously grants voice to an exiled statue speaking in its own defence. Philostratus himself repeatedly returns to the relationship between representation and presence elsewhere in his corpus (Philostr. *Imag*. 2.1-3 and

[3] Porter 2022: 182-184.

V A). The *Heroicus* should therefore be read not as an aberrant literary obsession with statues and material representations, but as a particularly sophisticated manipulation of a much broader intermedial discourse. Accordingly, this chapter argues that the *Heroicus* does not merely participate in or perpetuate the discourse of visual evidence as proof but simultaneously satirises it.

By reading the *Heroicus* alongside the visual traditions surrounding Protesilaus, this chapter demonstrates how Philostratus exploits an intermedial cultural environment to construct, and simultaneously undermine, the illusion of visual experience. The Vinedresser's description incorporates recognisable visual conventions that make his account intelligible and, within the terms of the dialogue, persuasive. Yet those same conventions also create distance between the Phoenician and Philostratus' educated reader. An audience familiar with Protesilaus' iconography and with the broader cultural discourse surrounding statues and epiphany is equipped not merely to accept the Vinedresser's story, but to recognise the artificiality of its construction. This tension is central to the humour and irony of the *Heroicus*. The cultural investment in statues, visual evidence, and epiphanic presence existed alongside persistent anxieties about the capacity of images to embody or represent their subjects adequately. Philostratus exploits both sides of this discourse within the text.

This chapter therefore builds upon the broader argument of the thesis by demonstrating that an intermedial approach can recover dimensions of literary meaning that remain obscured when text and image are considered in isolation. Whereas the preceding chapters examine the interaction of Latin epic with small-scale visual media at Rome and in the Bay of Naples, this chapter expands the geographical and cultural scope of the thesis to the western coast of Asia Minor and the Thracian Chersonese, and from Latin epic to the Greek dialogue of an Imperial Greek author. It also shifts the focus from direct correspondences between literary and visual representations towards a more diffuse but equally significant relationship between literary narrative, contemporary monuments, and the shared visual culture through which both were interpreted. Reading the *Heroicus* intermedially reveals that the visual evidence is not external to the literary text, waiting to be introduced by the modern interpreter. Philostratus already depended upon his

audience bringing that visual and material knowledge with them to the text. It is precisely this shared cultural knowledge that enables the Vinedresser's narrative to convince, as well as Philostratus' irony to operate, and the reader to recognise that what appears to be an experience of seeing has been constructed entirely through words.

The chapter will begin with an introduction to Philostratus' *Heroicus*, and then by establishing the broader Graeco-Roman association between sight and truth, before turning to the cultural and religious functions of statues as mediators between representation, presence, and memory. It will then focus on Protesilaus, examining the relationship between his mythic history, cult site, surviving iconography, and the Vinedresser's ekphrastic reconstruction of his appearance in the *Heroicus*. The following section will consider epiphany as a pre-existing religious and cultural phenomenon, showing how heroic presence in the dialogue is repeatedly tied to tombs, shrines, statues, and numinous landscapes. From this foundation, the chapter will analyse *enargeia* as the central mechanism through which the Vinedresser converts verbal testimony into a form of imagined autopsy, enabling the Phoenician to experience what he hears as though he had seen it for himself. Finally, the chapter will turn to the meta-level of the reader, arguing that the same visual and iconographic knowledge that makes the Vinedresser's account persuasive also exposes the artificiality of his construction, allowing Philostratus to exploit and simultaneously destabilise the authority of visual experience.

Throughout this thesis, I have referred to the Homeric hero by his Latin name, Ulysses, to respect the Latin texts. In this chapter, however, I adopt the Greek Odysseus to better reflect the language and literary context of the *Heroicus*.[4]

[4] Translated by Jeffrey Rusten and Jason König, Loeb Classical Library.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSTRATUS' *HEROICUS*

Flavius Philostratus was born in the late second century CE (c. 170CE) possibly in Lemnos (Philostr. *V A* 6.27),[5] though his birthplace remains uncertain. He spent time as a sophist in Athens before becoming associated with the court of Julia Domna (*V A* 1.3).[6] He flourished in Rome during the reign of Septimius Severus. Works attributed to Philostratus include *In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana*, *Lives of the Sophists*, *Gymnasticus, Heroicus, Epistola*e, and part of the *Imagines*.[7]

Philostratus' surviving works display a sustained interest in the relationship between verbal and visual representation. Modern scholarship has consequently paid considerable attention to his practice of ekphrasis. Tim Whitmarsh has described aspects of Philostratus' writing as "brilliantly ekphrastic,"[8] while James Porter characterises him as a master of ekphrastic genre.[9] Scholarship has looked in particular at the ekphrastic nature and visuality of Philostratus' engagement with the epic past in other works – namely the *Imagines*. A. Sophie Schoess specifically remarks upon how blurred the lines between visual and verbal become in *Imagines* 2.7.[10] Philostratus himself in the *Imagines* asserts that poets and painters make equal contributions to our knowledge of the looks and deeds of heroes, and that whoever scorns painting is doing an injustice to truth:

> Ὅστις μὴ ἀσπάζεται τὴν ζωγραφίαν, ἀδικεῖ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἀδικεῖ καὶ σοφίαν, ὁπόση ἐς ποιητὰς ἥκει—φορὰ γὰρ ἴση ἀμφοῖν ἐς τὰ τῶν ἡρώων ἔργα καὶ εἴδη (Philostr. *Imag*. 1.1). Whosoever scorns painting is unjust to truth; and he is also unjust to all the wisdom that has been bestowed upon poets—for poets and painters make equal contribution to our knowledge of the deeds and the looks of heroes.[11]

The formulation is significant for setting up discussion of the *Heroicus*. Visual and verbal representation are explicitly placed alongside one another as complementary means of

[5] Bowie 2009: 19.
[6] Maclean and Aitken 2002: xlvi; Bowie 2009: 20.
[7] Elsner 2009: 4.
[8] Whitmarsh 2013: 119: more specifically, Whitmarsh refers to Philostratus' physiognomic descriptions as "brilliantly ekphrastic"; they provide high levels of pictorial detail.
[9] Porter 2022: 182.
[10] Schoess 2021: 226, 213.
[11] Translated by Arthur Fairbanks.

accessing the heroic past. The intermedial relationship explored in the *Heroicus* consequently belongs to a broader Philostratean interest in the ways in which words and images together produce knowledge of absent heroes.

Porter, in his 2022 article, *Statue Fever in the Heroicus*, rightly claims that the *Heroicus* deserves closer scrutiny for the light it can throw on the "constitutive tensions" of ekphrasis.[12] The text provides an ekphrastic account of the epic past, taking images from the past and making them vivid and lively in the present by turning them into moving images – stories.[13] The *Heroicus* is a text saturated with materiality, and thus, asks to be studied intermedially.

Written by Philostratus in the first half of the 3rd century CE,[14] the *Heroicus* is a fictional dialogue between a Vinedresser and a Phoenician merchant who has travelled to Elaious, a town at the southern tip of the Thracian Chersonese – the peninsula which runs along the European side of the Hellespont.[15] More specifically, the work is set at the shrine of Protesilaus, at the centre of which stands a statue of the hero. His shrine, tomb, and cult statue provide the material setting for the encounter between the two speakers and remains an important point of reference throughout their conversation.[16] Visuality is a key point for the text, and the physical landscape of the dialogue is consequently populated by the material traces of the heroic past from its outset.

Within the *Heroicus*, the visual landscape contributes significantly to the construction of the narrative. The Vinedresser tends the land surrounding Protesilaus' sanctuary and claims to enjoy an extraordinary relationship with the hero. According to his account, Protesilaus regularly appears in the vicinity of his cult site, converses with him (*Her.* 2.8, 5.1), exercises, farms, offers advice, and recounts events from the Trojan War (*Her.* 2.6-

[12] Porter 2022: 182: Porter describes ekphrasis as "*adynata* in motion". They are implausible yet alluring – ekphrasis succeeds as an entertaining performance, but never fully delivers on its promises.
[13] Porter 2022: 200.
[14] Decloquement 2021: 187; there are four recognised Philostrati from the same family – Philostratus I, Philostratus II (The Athenian), Philostratus III (The Lemnian), and Philostratus IV (The Younger). The Philostratus in question here is Philostratus 'The Athenian', or "The Second". This Philostratus is the author of the *VA, VS, Her.*, and the first series of the *Imag*.
[15] Maclean and Aitken 2002: xliii.
[16] Porter 2022: 183.

11, 5.1, 17.3-6). The shrine and cult statue establish the sacred and commemorative setting within which the Vinedresser locates these encounters with Protesilaus. This distinction is important because the *Heroicus* repeatedly associates heroic presence with monuments, tombs, sanctuaries, and statues without suggesting that the hero is literally present within, or identical to, the material image.

Statuary is nevertheless conspicuous throughout the dialogue. Protesilaus is only the most important example within a work that also invokes or describes representations associated with figures including Ajax, Hector, Palamedes, Patroclus, and Achilles.[17] Porter has accordingly argued that the *Heroicus*' preoccupation with statuary exposes and exploits the constitutive tensions of ekphrasis, particularly its simultaneous promise to make the heroic past vividly present and its inability to guarantee the truth of what it makes visible.[18] These monuments form part of the broader sacred and mnemonic landscape through which the Vinedresser constructs his account of the Trojan War. Their precise interpretative function, and especially their relationship to the dialogue's appeals to visual experience and heroic presence, will be examined in later sections of this chapter.

SIGHT AND TRUTH

> "We prefer sight, generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason for this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions."
> Arist. *Metaph*. 1.1.980a 24-28.[19]

Before examining how Philostratus manipulates visual experience in the *Heroicus*, this section outlines the broader Graeco-Roman traditions that privileged sight as a means of knowing and associated visual presence with truth, thereby establishing the cultural assumptions upon which the dialogue is able to draw.

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[17] Ajax (*Her.* 18.4-5; 20.2), Hector (*Her.* 18.6; 19.3; 19.5), Palamedes (*Her.* 21.2-8; 22.2), Patroclus (*Her.* 22.3) and Achilles (*Her*. 54.3; 56.6; 56.10).
[18] Porter 2022: 181-182.
[19] Translated by Hugh Tredennick.

Across Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, historiography, and rhetoric, sight is repeatedly granted a privileged position among the senses. These traditions do not amount to a single theory of vision, nor do they establish an uncomplicated correspondence between seeing and truth, but demonstrate a recurrent association between seeing, firsthand knowledge, and authority. One strand of this tradition explicitly establishes a hierarchy between the senses. In addition to the famous opening of the *Metaphysics* cited above, Aristotle argues in *De sensu* (*Sens*. 436b-437a) that sight is particularly valuable because it allows human beings to perceive a greater range of distinctions. Stoic thought similarly assigns sensory apprehension an important role in the acquisition of knowledge. In his account of Zeno and the Stoics, Diogenes Laertius discusses the role that the sense-organs (eyes) play in the process in which the external world is apprehended and thought becomes possible (Diog. Laert. 7.49-54).

Polybius (12.27.1) similarly reports Heraclitus (B101a) as saying that eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears. Cicero states that sight is a form of proof (*Nat. D*. 2.5.25), and that "proof can be established by the evidence of two of the senses, those of touch and sight" (*Nat. D*. 2.15.40). Furthermore, in *De Oratore*, he asserts that the keenest of all senses is sight (*De or.* 3.40.161, 2.87.357), and that, "consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes" (*De or.* 2.87.357). This distinction between seeing and hearing is particularly prominent in traditions of eyewitness testimony. Herodotus repeatedly invokes personal autopsy to corroborate his accounts, marking claims with statements such as "I myself saw" (2.106, 2.156) as a way to concretely corroborate his accounts (2.148: "I have myself seen it, and indeed no words can tell its wonders"). Thucydides (1.22), likewise, stresses the importance of eyewitness accounts over hearsay in order to record the truth. Across these different genres and intellectual traditions, vision repeatedly functions not simply as one sense among others, but as a particularly powerful means by which the external world may be apprehended and authenticated. Seeing for oneself reduces the chain of mediation that separates an individual from the thing being described.

The authority associated with vision was not, however, equivalent to a guarantee of truth. Plato provides an especially important illustration of this tension. In the 'Analogy of the Sun' (Pl. *Resp*. 6.507b-509c), the faculty of sight and the possibility of being seen are described as especially precious, while light allows visible objects to be perceived and recognised (*Resp.* 6.507b-509c).[20] The importance of light for seeing is established (507e), and the sun illuminates – light allows us to observe, recognise and give truth to what is known (508d). *Timaeus* (*Ti.* 45b-47b) describes sight as the source of the greatest benefit to mankind:

> Vision, in my view, is the cause of the greatest benefit to us, inasmuch as none of the accounts now given concerning the Universe would ever have been given if men had not seen the stars or the sun or the heaven. But as it is, the vision of day and night and of months and circling years has created the art of number and has given us not only the notion of Time but also means of research into the nature of the Universe. From these we have procured Philosophy in all its range, than which no greater boon ever has come or will come, by divine bestowal, unto the race of mortals. This I affirm to be the greatest good of eyesight. (Pl. *Ti*. 47a-47b).[21]

Yet Plato also repeatedly exposes the instability of perception. The *Theaetetus* (*Tht*. 151e) interrogates the relationship between perception (αἴσθησις) and knowledge, while the *Sophist* (*Soph*. 264a-266d) acknowledges that both speech and image-making may participate in truth and falsehood. In 'The Allegory of the Cave' (Pl. *Resp*. 514a-521b), the prisoners see shadows projected upon a wall and mistake those visual appearances for reality. Something may appear immediately and persuasively before the eyes while nevertheless being incorrectly understood.

The cultural authority and privileged status of the visual also provided authors with a means through which to conceptualise their own medium. Greek and Roman poetry repeatedly imagined literary composition in competition with visual forms. Pindar, for example, frames song through architectural and monumental imagery (*Pyth*. 6.5, 7-14), while Horace famously constructs his poetic achievement as a *monumentum* more enduring than bronze (*Carm*. 3.30.1-9). Such comparisons reveal the extent to which the authority of one medium could be articulated through the properties of another: poetry

[20] Translated by Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; LSJ, s.v. πολυτελής: valuable, expensive, precious.
[21] Translated by R. G. Bury.

claims visibility, monumentality, and presence by adopting the language of material culture.

Taken together, these traditions demonstrate a recurrent interest in ancient literature in sight as a particularly authoritative means of knowing. Seeing offered personal verification, and direct access to information unavailable through hearsay. At the same time, ancient thought repeatedly acknowledges that sight does not guarantee truth. Visual appearances may be misunderstood, images may deceive, and what appears immediately convincing may nevertheless be false. This tension is fundamental to the *Heroicus*. The persuasive force of the Vinedresser's account depends upon the cultural authority attached to seeing, while Philostratus' capacity to destabilise that authority depends upon the recognition that visual conviction and truth are not identical.

STATUES IN GRAECO-ROMAN THOUGHT

Much of Greek Imperial literature is characterised by the desire to connect with the Greek past and its culture.[22] This is not just done through verbal quotation but is also revealed through the inclusion within texts of cult statues, shrines, and well-known examples of ideal sculpture.[23] Given that Greek Imperial literature exists within a culture of visuality, in which sight was considered the ultimate force for 'truth', or the illusion of access to the truth,[24] we must analyse these textual works with objects of sight in mind. This is particularly true for the *Heroicus* – a text which so clearly engages with and explores the dynamic between textual and visual authority.

Traditionally, modern scholarship has asserted that Greek Imperial literature is about literary authority and the power of words to convince, persuade, and influence.[25] This literature often engaged in "Homerkritik" as a means of demonstrating the power of language, in addition to demonstrating a wider cultural desire of connecting and engaging

[22] Maclean and Aitken 2002: xlviii; Whitmarsh 2001: 6; Bowie 1970: 3-4, 28; Goldhill 2001: 8; Kim 2010: 3, 5-6; Anderson 1993: 11.
[23] Nagy and Due 2002; Mestre 2004: 139; E.g. Philostr. *Imag.*, *Her*; Paus. 1.26.4; Dio Chrys. *Or.*12.
[24] Gosling 1973: 120-139; Jonas 1982: 135-152; Jay 1993: 21-31; and Bartsch 2006: 15-17, 42-77; Squire 2016; Platt 2011.
[25] Bassino and Benzi 2021: 5; Bowie 1970: 4-10; Richter and Johnson 2017: 4; Bowersock 2003: 1; Anderson 1993: 13-21.

with the Greek past and its culture.[26] I intend to demonstrate that studying Philostratus' *Heroicus* alongside statues reveals that this authority for accessing and engaging with the past in Imperial Greek literature depended on an intermedial dynamic. For the Vinedresser, literary truth cannot be separated from visual culture or authority. Literature's authority within the empire did not come from words alone, but from how words mobilise and feed on the cultural power of images. Yet, the images that Philostratus provides are ultimately not so visual. All images are communicated via verbal accounts, and it is not made clear where the Vinedresser's reality is merely a trick of shadows. It is the introduction of real-life statues and other objects from within Protesilaus' iconography to this discussion that makes the Vinedresser's narrative seem so comically unreliable.

As established above, in Graeco-Roman thought, it was the eyes that gave access to truth. As visual objects, statues thus held a powerful place in ancient belief.[27] They could function not merely as representations of an absent individual, but as substitutes or stand-ins for that person, preserving their presence within a particular social, commemorative, or sacred context. This capacity was especially pronounced in cult statuary, where the image could be understood as a locus for divine presence and, in some contexts, as housing or embodying the god.[28] Ancient literary and religious traditions consequently invested statues with an ever-present potential for animation: the boundary between inert representation and living presence was imagined as permeable, even when no literal transformation occurred. The genealogy of Greek statuary reinforces this association between image, presence, and commemoration. The archaic *kouros*, from which later representations of idealised male youths developed, functioned from an early stage both as a *sēma* (σῆμα), marking and standing in for the dead, and as an *agalma* (ἄγαλμα), a votive object offered within a sacred context.[29] Statues therefore occupied an unstable position between representation and presence,

[26] Kim 2010: 5-10.
[27] For this chapter, I am using Stewart's definition of a statue: "free-standing sculptural representations of full figures; they are usually life-size or larger. The word is sometimes more loosely applied to include, for example, architectural sculptures, but the basic sense is clear": Stewart 2003: 19.
[28] Strazdins 2023: 220.
[29] Steiner 2001: 253; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 108-297; Neer 2010: 21, 58; Strazdins 2023: 126, 200.

memorial and embodiment, object and person. They were thought to possess the ability to move or embody the spirit or soul of the divine.[30] In addition to appealing to the sense of sight, the practice of sculpting was thought to reflect the process of reaching the truth – just as a sculptor removes what is superfluous to reveal the form within, so we remove false opinions to reveal the true (Plotinus, *Enneades* 1.6.9). Statues evoked powerful emotional responses from viewers and held a prominent space within literature for their desirability or their power (Ovid's Pygmalion episode is a notable example: Ov. *Met*. 10. 243-297; also, Lucian, *Erotes* 15-16: a youth becomes erotically obsessed with the statue of Aphrodite at Knidos and attempts to have intercourse with it) as well as their metonymic function. Statues possess more power than other visual media, such as paintings, as their three dimensionality could grant them a distinctive sense of physical presence in the same space and their viewer.[31]

Statues give the past a material and visible presence that texts do not: such objects can make the distant past feel newly present by giving viewers a sense of immediate proximity and the illusion of direct access to people and events that are otherwise inaccessible. Their material and visual presence can therefore lend historical or mythical narratives an apparent credibility – what can be seen seems easier to accept as real. This effect is intensified by the possibility of physical engagement, since visual encounter also invites touch. The past is consequently experienced not only as something considered intellectually, but as something with tangible, bodily form in the present.[32] The greater sense of 'lifelikeness' that statues possess attracts the viewer to touch them (Philostr. *Her.* 19.4). They can transfix a viewer and provoke a variety of emotions, from erotic delight to despair.[33] Statues were deeply embedded in the social, political, and religious fabric of archaic and classical Greece.[34] They were key artefacts within the cultural

[30] Platt 2011: 248.
[31] Steiner 2001: xiv.
[32] Porter 2022: 187.
[33] Hyg. *Fab*. 103-104; Ov. *Her*. 13.102-112; Lucian, *Dial Mort*. 28; Steiner 2001: xii.
[34] Stewart 2003: 2-6: In Rome, roads were lined with funerary monuments, cities were filled with temples, baths contained massive repositories of statues, the Colosseum's niches were filled with statues, and it stood alongside Nero's colossus, the Area Capitolina contained so many statues that Augustus removed some to the Campus Martius. Journeys through the city entailed sightings of imperial fora, temples and sanctuaries, arches, basilicas, porticoes, theatres, imperial mausolea, and stadia. Courtyards and gardens contained household shrines and decorative statuettes; Steiner 2001: xi.

landscape, and all statues were erected with a particular function to perform.[35] Statues are meant to be seen (Philostr. *Her*. 18.2, 19.4) and are conscious and deliberate markers on the landscape to serve as visual disseminators of a communal culture.[36] They were often placed in public and busy places, such as the agora, gymnasium, or theatre. As Estelle Strazdins notes, the more a statue could present an obstacle to passing crowds, the more desirable – this increased the likelihood that the statue would be noticed and considered important.[37] Statues could be interred in the place of an absent body, so that they may find rest in the underworld (Hdt. 6.58.3; Eur. *Hel*. 1243; Hom. *Il*. 23.70-74),[38] they could act as "voodoo dolls",[39] or have ghost repelling qualities.[40] They could act as replacement figures to provide a form of contact between the living and the dead, functioning as visible statements of the enduring relations between the person depicted and the viewer – much like between Laodamia and Protesilaus (Hyg. *Fab.* 104; Ov. *Her*. 13).[41] Indeed, statues often stood over tombs to serve as memorials for the dead.[42] They marked the presence of the absent, while yet remaining as a constant presence as time goes on.[43] In all of these cases, the depiction seems to have been linked to its source by virtue of an intrinsic property – the *eikon* is "a stepping stone to the original that gives the viewer access to a hidden or absent reality."[44] Individuals could be honoured or punished via the treatment of their statue (Paus. 6.11.6-9, 6.13.1, 7.17.14). This suggests that the statue has the capacity to represent closely the absent original.[45] Indeed, cult statues were thought to act as a vessel which could house a numinous power which would take up residence inside.[46]

[35] Kellum 2015: 424; Steiner 2001: xii.
[36] Steiner 2001: 32; for additional and extensive modern discussion on ancient statues see also: Stewart 2003; Spivey 1996; Hölscher 2018; Strazdins 2023: 194-243; Stewart 2003; Bremmer 2013; Platt 2003; Schnapp 1994; Vermeule 1968; Chaniotis 2017.
[37] Strazdins 2023: 195; Stewart 2003: 136-140; Ma 2013: 67-98.
[38] Steiner 2001: 6.
[39] Steiner 2001: 9.
[40] Steiner 2001: 10.
[41] Steiner 2001: 32.
[42] Neer 2010: 22; Strazdins 2023: 200.
[43] Neer 2010: 30.
[44] Steiner 2001: 5.
[45] Steiner 2001: 9.
[46] Steiner 2001: 79.

The intermedial character of this cultural landscape is perhaps especially visible in the personification of literary works themselves as statues. In Roman Athens, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were represented in sculptural form (Athens, Agora Mus. S 2038, S 2039, and I 6628), transforming literary texts into anthropomorphic presences within the civic environment. The inscribed base associated with the *Iliad* complicates this relationship further by giving the personified poem a verbal voice.[47] Here, text and image cannot easily be separated – the poem is given material and visible form through sculpture, while the statue depends upon inscribed language to identify and articulate what it represents. Such monuments provide a particularly striking example of the extent to which verbal and visual representation could operate together within Imperial Greek culture, rather than being experienced as entirely discrete modes.

Statues were often noted for possessing agency;[48] moving and seeing (Eur. *Eurysth*. F 372 Kannicht), falling to their knees (Hdt. 5.82-86), turning away from their bases (Eur. *IT*. 1165-1176),[49] closing their eyes at the sight of crime or other scenes of disgust (Apollod. *Epit*. 5.22; Quint. Smyrn. 13.425-429; Heraclid. Pont. F49;[50] Ov. *Fast*. 3.45-46) or healing the sick (Paus. 6.5.4-9, 6.11.2-9, 9.24.3; Lucian, *Philops*. 18-20, *Deor. Conc*. 12). Roman statues were known to move or bleed (Caes. *BCiv*. 3.105.6; Plut. *Vit. Caes*. 47; Obseq. *Prod*. 65a; Cass. Dio 41.61.4; Livy 23.31.15). They could give thanks (Plut. *Vit. Cor*. 37.4; Plut. *Mor*. 318F), weep (Livy 40.19.2, 43.13.4; Obseq. *Prod*. 28; Cass. Dio 24 fr. 84.2; August. *De civ. D*. 3.11; Ov. *Fast*. 4.521) or sweat (Livy 22.1.8-20; Cass. Dio 13, 40.17.12; Livy 27.4.11-15; Cic. *Div*. 1.98, 2.58; Flor. 1.24; Obseq. *Prod*. 54, 63; App. *B Civ*. 2.36; Verg. *G*. 1.480; Ov. *Met*. 15.792; Sen. *Thyest*. 702; Plut. *Vit. Cor*. 38.1-3). One statue, mentioned by Cassius Dio, is said to have turned from east to west in 31BCE to signal the fall of Antony and then spat blood (Cass. Dio. 54.7.3).[51]

[47] Ἰλιας ἡ μετθ᾽ Ὅμερον ἐγὼ καὶ πρόσθεν Ὁμήρ[ου Πάρστατις ἵδρυμαι τῶι μὲ τεκόντι υεῶ[ι:
"The *Iliad*, I that was both after Homer and before Homer, have been set up alongside him that bore me in his earlier years." Translated by Thompson 1954: 63.
[48] Bremmer 2013: 7.
[49] Of course, Iphigenia is lying here; but it worked, nonetheless.
[50] In Bremmer 2013:10
[51] Bremmer 2013: 14.

Yet the reverential and animating potential of statues existed alongside a markedly more sceptical and irreverent tradition. Ancient responses to statuary repeatedly expose anxiety about the adequacy of the image as a representation of the person or divinity it intended to embody. Lucian is particularly useful in this respect, since his treatment of celebrated cult images combines admiration while also drawing attention to their more ridiculous aspects or limitations. Lucian reveals in *Zeus Tragoedus* that the monumental cult statue of Zeus at Olympia was reduced to a hollow structure, from within which mice and rats could be heard scuttling (Lucian, *Jtr.* 8).[52] Lucian here reveals the stark contrast between the statue's religious prestige and the humiliating physical reality of the object, exposing the instability of any straightforward identification between divine presence and material image. The Aphrodite of Knidos also provides an example of this instability. Although the statue functioned as an image of the goddess (Lucian, *Erotes* 11-17), ancient anecdotal tradition also connected its form with the mortal beauty of Praxiteles' mistress, conventionally identified as Phryne (Ath. *Deipn*. 13.591a), or Cratina (Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4.53P). Divine representation is therefore complicated by the possibility that the body presented as Aphrodite is itself derived from an individual human model.

Such examples demonstrate that ancient attitudes towards statues were never unanimously reverential. The capacity of statuary to substitute for, embody, or evoke an absent person or divinity was accompanied by an equally persistent awareness of the gap between image and individual. This tension is particularly important for the *Heroicus*, where Philostratus exploits both sides of the cultural discourse surrounding statues: their capacity to make heroic presence seem plausible, and the latent absurdity involved in treating material representation as unproblematic evidence for that presence.

Philostratus' treatment of Protesilaus and the other Trojan War heroes in the *Heroicus* draws upon these same cultural assumptions. Statues, tombs, and sanctuaries repeatedly mark the places in which heroic presence can be imagined or encountered, while the heroes themselves remain distinct from their material representations. The

[52] Juv. 8 as another example of the fragility and inadequacy of statues compared to the grandeur of what they're supposed to represent.

relationship between Protesilaus' cult statue, his epiphanic appearances, and the broader visual tradition surrounding the hero will be examined in the following section.

PROTESILAUS: IMAGE, PRESENCE, AND ICONOGRAPHY

Protesilaus warrants particular attention because his visual and cultic presence structures the *Heroicus* from its outset. The dialogue takes place within the landscape of his sanctuary at Elaious, where his tomb, shrine, cult statue, and the natural environment associated with his death provide the setting for the encounter between the Vinedresser and the Phoenician. It is here, moreover, that the Vinedresser claims Protesilaus continues to appear and converse with him, providing the eyewitness testimony upon which his subsequent corrections of Homer depend. Protesilaus therefore offers the first and most sustained example in the dialogue of the relationship between material monument, sacred landscape, visual representation, and heroic epiphany. His prominence is not simply a consequence of his role as the Vinedresser's informer; the physical and visual traces of Protesilaus establish from the beginning the conditions through which his continued presence can be imagined.

Protesilaus was the son of Iphicles and grandson of Phylacos (Hom. *Il.* 2.695; Prop. 1.19.8). According to later tradition, he was originally named Iolaus but acquired the name Protesilaus (πρῶτος + λαός) because he was the first of the Greeks to land at Troy and the first to die there (Hyg. *Fab.* 103). Homer gives him only a brief appearance in the Catalogue of Ships, where the narrative turns immediately from his former command to his death:

> τῶν αὖ Πρωτεσίλαος ἀρήιος ἡγεμόνευε
> ζωὸς ἐών· τότε δ' ἤδη ἔχεν κάτα γαῖα μέλαινα.
> τοῦ δὲ καὶ ἀμφιδρυφὴς ἄλοχος Φυλάκῃ ἐλέλειπτο
> καὶ δόμος ἡμιτελής· τὸν δ' ἔκτανε Δάρδανος ἀνὴρ
> νηὸς ἀποθρῴσκοντα πολὺ πρώτιστον Ἀχαιῶν. (Hom. *Il.* 2.698-702)
> Of these in turn warlike Protesilaus was leader, while he was still alive; but by that time the black earth already held him fast. His wife, her cheeks torn in wailing, was left in Phylace and his house but half completed, and him a Dardanian warrior killed as he leapt from his ship by far the first of the Achaeans.[53]

[53] Translated by A.T. Murray.

Protesilaus is thus introduced by Homer through absence. The hero is already dead, leaving behind a grieving wife and an unfinished house. Yet this fleeting Homeric presence generated an extensive later reception centred particularly upon his premature death, his relationship with Laodamia, his cult, and his continuing posthumous presence.[54] Ancient sources repeatedly remember him as the first Greek to land and die at Troy, locate his sanctuary at Elaious, recount the grief of Laodamia, or explore his continued existence after death.[55] The very brevity of his heroic career consequently makes his later cultural visibility striking. Protesilaus becomes a hero whose presence is repeatedly reconstructed after the fact through text, cult, monument, and image.

Most important for the *Heroicus* is the older mythic tradition in which Protesilaus already negotiates the boundary between absence and presence through material representation. In accounts of his relationship with Laodamia, Protesilaus returns temporarily from the dead to be reunited with his wife (Apollod. *Epit*. 3.30), while Laodamia subsequently maintains her attachment to an image of her deceased husband (Hyg. *Fab*. 103-104; Ov. *Her*. 13.102-112; Lucian, *Dial*. *mort*. 28; Euripides' lost *Protesilaus*). Hyginus describes her devotion to an effigy of Protesilaus, which her father eventually orders destroyed; Laodamia then throws herself into the fire with it (*Fab*. 103-104). Eustathius, commenting on Hom. *Il*. 2.700, points out that Laodamia preferred consorting with the statue over her actual husband.[56] Ovid's *Heroides* similarly imagines Laodamia possessing a waxen likeness of her absent husband. The image is already more than a mere representation:

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[54] Vermeule 1992; Porter 2022: 185; LIMC VII: "Protesilaos".

[55] A non-exhaustive list of mentions in ancient literature include discussions of his genealogy (Hyg. *Fab*. 97; Pind. *Isthm*. 1.58-59), physical descriptions (Dares of Phrygia's *History of the Fall of Troy* 13), his role among the Greek commanders (Apollod. *Epit*. 3.14) and how many ships he brought from Phylace to Troy (Dares 14). Occurring frequently are mentions of him being the first to land and die at Troy (Apollod. *Epit*. 3.30; Hyg. *Fab*. 103; Quint. Smyrn. 7.407-411; Pausanias 1.34.2; *The Cypria* fr. 17 (cited in Pausanias 4.2.7); Catull. 68.73-130), as well as his death at the hands of Hector (Dares 19), or Aeneas (Dictys 2.11). Sources also focus on his death and the tradition of his role in the Underworld (Lucian, *Dial*. *mort*. 23.1), as well as Laodamia's grief or the couples' love (Eur. *Protesilaos* (lost); Ov. *Her*. 13; Hyg. *Fab* 104; Laevius *Protesilaodamia* (lost); Catull. 61, 68.73-130; Prop. 1.19.9-10). There are focusses too on his sanctuary at Elaious (Hdt. 9.116-121, 7.23; Strabo 7; Thuc. 8.102.3), and more specifically on the trees planted at his shrine (Antiphilus of Byzantium *Palatine Anthology* 7.141; Plin. *HN* 16.238), or Alexander the Great visiting the shrine before crossing into Asia (Arr. *Anab*. 1.11). Pliny also mentions the statue of Protesilaus by Deinomenes (Plin. *HN* 34.76).

[56] Porter 2022: 195.

> crede mihi, plus est, quam quod uideatur, imago;
> adde sonum cerae, Protesilaus erit. (Ov. *Her*. 13.155-156)
> Believe me, the image is more than it appears; add a voice to the wax, and it will be Protesilaus.

The force of the couplet lies precisely in its tantalising gap between representation and presence. The wax remains an image,[57] yet Laodamia experiences it as capable of becoming Protesilaus if only voice were supplied. The wax remains an image, yet Laodamia imagines it as capable of becoming Protesilaus if only *sonus* were supplied. Ovid's choice of *sonus*, rather than the more specifically vocal *vox*, makes the threshold between representation and presence slight: mere sound is apparently sufficient to animate the image into Protesilaus, before the following lines develop this fantasy further by imagining that it might actually *uerba referre* ("answer in words": *Her.* 13.158). From this, Maurizio Bettini explains that this figure of Protesilaus holds a greater capacity merely than to be seen.[58] He extrapolates from this a cultural model that can be seen within the story – the shade of Protesilaus that returns from the Underworld is equivalent to the waxen portrait of Protesilaus.[59] Within this perceived model, the statue representations of Protesilaus are as significant and powerful as Protesilaus himself. The traditions of the returning shade and the substituted image therefore participate in the same cultural logic: both negotiate the possibility that the absent or dead individual might become present again through representation.[60] Philostratus' Protesilaus enters the *Heroicus* with this history already attached to him. His association with images, resurrection, and unstable boundaries between presence and absence was not a Philostratean invention, but an established feature of his reception.

This history makes the setting of the *Heroicus* especially significant. The Vinedresser does not encounter Protesilaus in an abstract or neutral landscape, but at a cult site already saturated with material traces of the hero. Literary sources attest sanctuaries associated with Protesilaus at Phylace (Philostr. *Her.* 16.5; Pind. *Isthm*. 1.58-59) and,

[57] The specification of wax itself seems significant. Rather than possessing the permanence of bronze, or any other monumental material, was offers a more mutable form of representation, one especially suited to the unstable boundary between representation and animated substitute that structures Laodamia's relationship with the image.
[58] Bettini 1999: 11.
[59] Bettini 1999: 11.
[60] Bettini 1999: 9-11.

more prominently, at Elaious on the Thracian Chersonese (Hdt. 7.33.1, 9.116-120; Thuc. 8.102.3; Strabo 13.1.31; 7.frg.51; Paus. 1.34.2). The sanctuary at Elaious was better known and is the setting for the *Heroicus*. The cult at Elaious thrived for almost a millennium, from the 6th century BCE through to the 4th century CE.[61] The site has been identified as modern day Eski Hissarlik, where there is now only a Turkish memorial to the fallen soldiers of the First World War.[62] The site was visited by Heinrich Schliemann,[63] and was excavated by French soldiers after the end of the First World War.[64] Despite the lack of surviving ancient remains, the site is first mentioned by Herodotus (9.116-120), who describes at Elaious a tomb within a sacred enclosure and rich offerings deposited there, while later sources preserve traditions surrounding the vegetation associated with the hero. The *adyton* – the secure, roofed building – he mentions (9.116.3) is likely where these were housed.[65] We also know from Thucydides that the site must have been on the territory of Elaious and not in the city itself, as he mentions a ship that ran aground opposite the sanctuary of Protesilaus (8.102.3: κατὰ τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦ προτεσιλάου).[66] The mound mentioned by Philostratus has also been identified as one 500 metres from the present shore of Morto Bay.[67] The shrine at Elaious contained a statue of Protesilaus, posed like a ship's captain – positioned on the prow of a ship and preparing to leap.

In the *Heroicus*, this landscape itself seems to enact Protesilaus' story. The Vinedresser points out the mound containing his body and describes the elms planted around it: those branches facing Troy blossom prematurely and then lose their leaves and die before their time, reproducing in the natural environment the hero's own premature flourishing and death (*Her.* 9.1-3). Protesilaus is therefore visible before he appears. His biography has been written into the topography.

The sanctuary and cult statue extend this materialisation of heroic memory. The Vinedresser describes the shrine as a once impressive structure now largely lost, its

[61] Stewart 2022: 283; Jones 2001: 144.
[62] Jones 2001: 144.
[63] Schliemann 1884: 256-257.
[64] Jones 2001: 145; Demangel 1926.
[65] Jones 2001: 144.
[66] Jones 2001: 145.
[67] Jones 2001: 145.

former scale recoverable only from the surviving foundations (*Her.* 9.5). The statue itself stands upon a base shaped like the prow of a ship, with Protesilaus positioned as its commander:

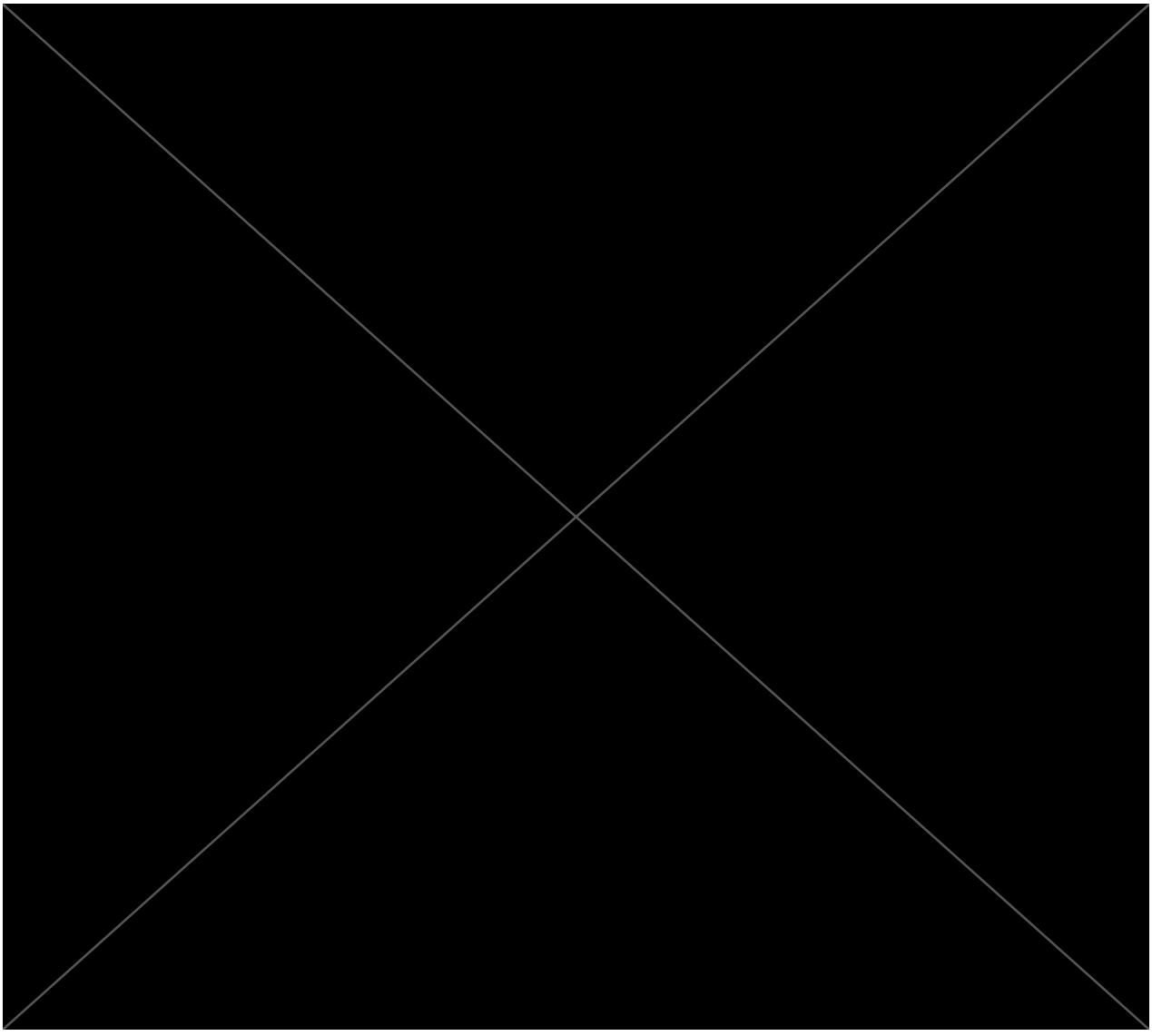
> καταλείπεται δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁρᾷς ὡς ὀλίγα. τότε δέ, οἶμαι, χαρίεν τε ἦν καὶ οὐ μικρόν, ὡς ἔστι τοῖς θεμελίοις ξυμβαλέσθαι. τὸ δὲ ἄγαλμα τοῦτο βέβηκε μὲν ἐπὶ νεώς, τὸ γὰρ τῆς βάσεως σχῆμα πρῷρα, ἵδρυται δὲ ναύαρχος. (Philostr. *Her.* 9.5-6)
> But you see how little is left of it. To judge from its foundations, though, it used to be a fine and large area in those days. The statue is standing on a ship, for its base is in the shape of a prow, and he is set up as the ship's captain.

The image consequently fixes Protesilaus in the defining moment of his myth – his arrival by ship and movement towards the Trojan shore. Yet it also freezes him at an incomplete moment, immediately before the event for which he is most famous: his premature death upon landing. The statue therefore proves an inadequate representation in two senses – its physical form has faded with time, while its iconography itself captures only the approach to, rather than the defining culmination of, Protesilaus' story. Time and worship have transformed the statue. The Vinedresser remarks that its appearance has been worn away both by age and by worshippers who anointed it and sealed their prayers upon it (*Her.* 9.6-7). The damage itself testifies to the long devotional life of the object. Far from being a pristine representation, the statue is materially marked by generations of encounters between viewer, worshipper, image, and hero.

The relationship between this material representation and Protesilaus' epiphanic presence is best understood spatially rather than as a simple identification of statue and spirit. The Vinedresser never claims that the cult statue itself animates or becomes Protesilaus. Rather, the hero's appearances occur within the sacred landscape marked by his body, tomb, sanctuary, statue, and associated vegetation. The statue is therefore one component of a cultic environment in which heroic presence becomes intelligible. Protesilaus remains distinct from his material image, but his apparition is repeatedly situated within the space that preserves and represents him. More simply than lending plausibility to the encounter, this environment provides the necessary conditions for epiphany. Protesilaus' manifestation is inseparable from the tomb site and sanctuary. The shrine does not need literally to contain the returning spirit for its material and

religious associations to establish the conditions in which such an encounter can plausibly be imagined.

Nor was the form in which Protesilaus was represented at Elaious visually unique. Coins provide particularly important evidence for a recognisable iconography associated with the hero. Protesilaus appears on coinage from Skione, Thessaly, and Elaious, frequently in connection with a ship or prow.[68] A silver hemidrachm of Phthiotic Thebes from the early third century BCE (c. 302-286BCE) depicts him leaping ashore from the prow of a ship (Figure 20),[69] while a bronze coin of Elaious from the reign of Commodus represents an armed Protesilaus standing upon the prow of a warship (Figure 21):[70]



[68] Maclean and Aitken 2002: liii.
[69] Private collection; Stewart 2022: 274.
[70] Berlin, Munzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen 18235375; Stewart 2022: 283.

The latter is especially significant for the *Heroicus*, since it originates from the cult centre in which Philostratus sets the dialogue and presents the hero in a form closely comparable to the Vinedresser's description of the sanctuary image. These coins demonstrate that the combination of Protesilaus, martial identity, ship, and act of disembarkation belonged to a visual tradition extending beyond Philostratus' text. This pose is also depicted on a late geometric vase, an early classical intaglio, and Roman copies of the bronze Protesilaus by Deinomenes (Plin. *HN* 34.76, 34.50).[71] A late fourth century BCE relief from Sigeium possibly depicts Protesilaus in the company of Athena and another heroic figure.[72] Protesilaus is referenced on funerary monuments, including in an epigram on Herodes Atticus' Arch of Eternal Concord, commemorating the death of his wife, Regilla (*SEG* 23.121),[73] and on sarcophagi (Vatican Museums, inv. 2465, as an example). Strazdins has demonstrated that the use of Protesilaus on the Arch of Eternal Concord was intended to embed grief within a space to make a personal claim over it.[74] From this, it is possible to see that within the contemporary, real-life cultural context, people such as Herodes Atticus imagined Protesilaus as a numinous figure that could inhabit physical spaces.

A related iconographic type has also been associated with surviving Roman statues. Two principal examples, now in the British Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, have traditionally been identified as Roman versions of a Greek bronze type sometimes connected with the Protesilaus attributed by Pliny to Deinomenes (c. 400-396BCE – *HN* 34.76, 34.50). The statues preserve a combination of features that accords closely with Protesilaus' established visual tradition: a youthful heroic male body, martial equipment, forward movement, and, in the London example, a maritime setting. Both figures advance dramatically, their bodies caught at a moment of transition between movement and collapse. Each also preserves a wound beneath the arm, a detail that has contributed to their identification as a hero represented at or immediately before the moment of death. Whatever the precise identification of each surviving copy, they

[71] Maclean and Aitken 2002: liii.
[72] Maclean and Aitken 2002: liii.
[73] The epigram is carved into the eastern pillar and references Protesilaus' half-built house: Strazdins 2024: 185-186.
[74] Strazdins 2024: 184-190, also: 175-176, 179.

demonstrate the availability within Roman visual culture of a recognisable wounded heroic type compatible with the representation of Protesilaus. If these statues were indeed recognisable as Protesilaus, they sharpen the inadequacy of the image described in the *Heroicus*. Whereas the wounded type captures the hero at the very moment that defines his myth (his death), Philostratus' statue captures him just before it, perpetually approaching the event that made him famous. The contrast therefore makes the *Heroicus*' monument seem both physically eroded and iconographically incomplete.

Though this particular statue from Elaious is now lost, Andrew Stewart believes other versions of this type must have stood in Rome.[75] This is certainly true. The statue of Protesilaus in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (25.116) was excavated in Rome, near the Porta San Paolo in the early 1920s.[76] The Elaian coins also depict this Elaian monument. A statue base discovered in Pergamum has been attributed to another copy.[77] Philostratus tells us that his cult statue is badly worn and stands apart from the original base (Philostr. *Her.* 9.5-6); Stewart is confident that Philostratus' account of the precinct is clearly a firsthand one.[78] Given that other statues of this type are attested throughout the empire, it seems equally, if not more, plausible to suggest that Philostratus had either seen other versions of the same statue or had simply drawn from other statues of similar types to reconstruct the statue from the Thracian Chersonese. Considering that Philostratus' description of the wounds of Protesilaus match those found on actual statues of Protesilaus in Naples (more detailed discussion to follow), I would argue that he was at least personally familiar with some versions of Protesilaus statues.

Stewart notes also that this statue type of Protesilaus mimics the Augustus of the Prima Porta in mirror image,[79] and therefore likely did not predate the 1st century BCE, making it either Augustan or Julio-Claudian.[80] Even if the statue indeed did not predate the 2nd

[75] Stewart 2022: 284.
[76] Richter 1954: 23; more on this statue in discussion to come.
[77] Stewart 2022: 284; Kleiner 1992: 63-67; Cavalier 2017: 459-460.
[78] Stewart 2022: 283.
[79] Stewart 2022: 284.
[80] Stewart 2022: 287.

century BCE, this does not provide sufficient evidence for an Augustan or Julio-Claudian origin. However, given that Augustus funded the recovery of "ex-Trojan Ilion" and the sanctuary of Athena Ilias,[81] he conceivably may also have funded renovations of Elaious and the shrine of Protesilaus.[82] Furthermore, since the Elaian coins date to the reigns of Commodus and Caracalla, it certainly seems plausible that renewed interest in the site occurred intermittently; this would also account for the site being in ruins again during Philostratus' time, as this would have been c. 200 years following Augustan renovations. The intermittent attention given to the shrine site at Elaious would certainly mirror the intermittent attention given to Troy.[83]

To return now to the Roman statues of Protesilaus, there is one main iconographical group which comprises a statue in the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These two statues are regarded as copies of a Greek bronze original from the 5th century BCE by a possible Deinomenes.[84] The statue in the British Museum (1876,0903.1-2) was found in 1876 in Cyzicus (Anatolia, northwestern Türkiye)[85] by two antiquities dealers, Carabella and Madella (Figure 22).[86] The statue is Pentelic marble, with some dark striations with mica and bigger crystals.[87] It was discovered with an elaborate base, which bore two male feet that matched the statue's pose and material (Pentelic marble). The statue's current tree-trunk support was added by Carabella and Madella. They also supplied the statue with a head, which was removed soon after.[88] The original base (sans tree-trunk) shows Protesilaus advancing down a tapering battering ram, surrounded by waves.[89] A fishtail visible on the right, with a large scar behind it, could be the remains of a tuna (the source of Cyzicus' wealth and celebrated on coins).[90]

[81] Cass. Dio 54.7; Strabo 13.1.27; Minchin 2012: 86.
[82] Stewart 2022: 287.
[83] Rose 1998, 2014; Minchin 2012.
[84] Richter 1929: 27; (Pliny *HN* 34.76, 34.50)
[85] Notably, this location is only c. 200 kilometres from the shrine of Elaious on the Thracian Chersonese.
[86] Stewart 2022: 269.
[87] Frel 1973: 120.
[88] Stewart 2022: 269.
[89] For detailed discussion about why the tapering plank must be a ram, see Stewart 2022: 274-275.
[90] Stewart 2022: 274.

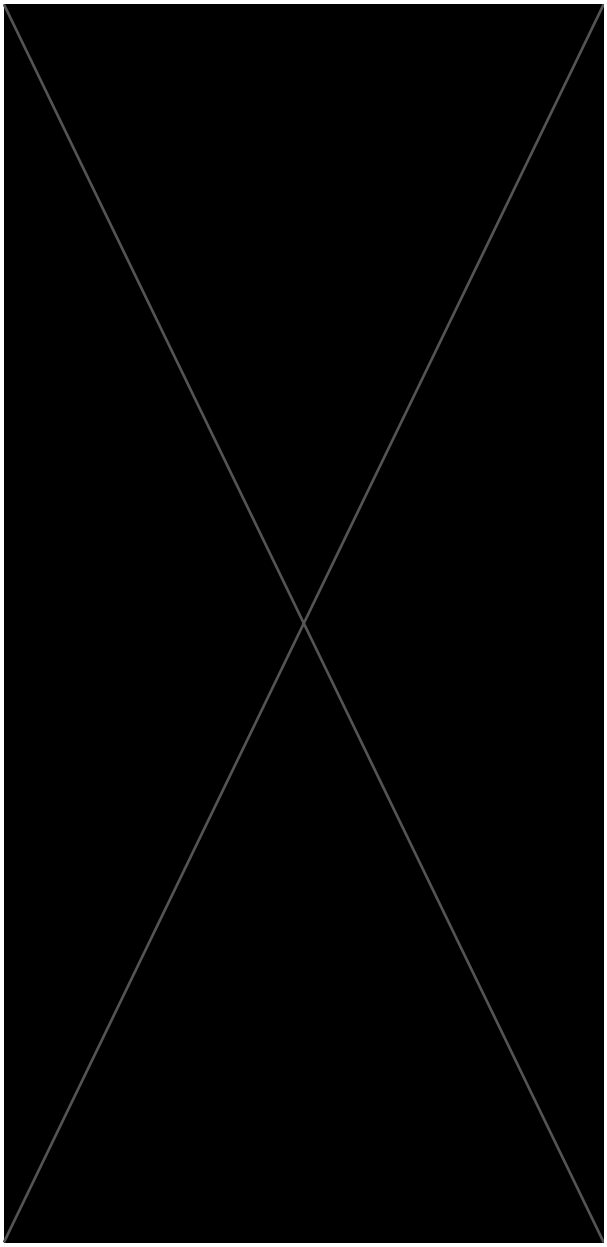
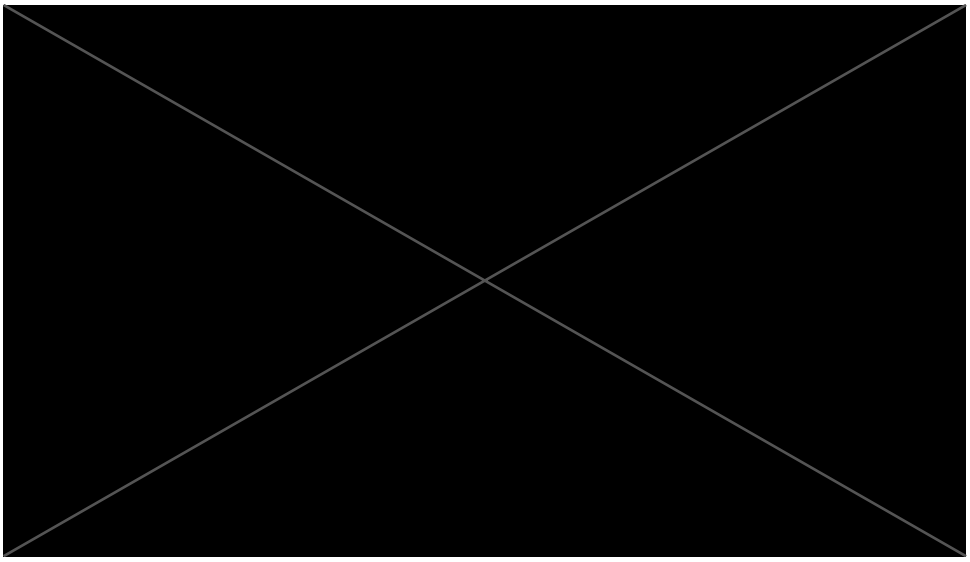


Figure 22: Partially preserved marble statue of a hero, possibly Protesilaus, from Cyzicus. Roman copy after a Greek original of c. 450-430 BCE. Pentelic marble. Above: torso, British Museum, inv. 1876,0903.1: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1876-0903-1?selectedImageId=136326001
Below: base with feet, showing the hero striding on the prow of a ship, British Museum, inv. 1876,0903.2: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1876-0903-2?selectedImageId=1605787001
Images © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.



It has a wound under the armpit – the break of the right arm runs through the slash mark, the lower lip of which is easily visible.[91] At first glance, this wound underneath the armpit does not seem sufficiently serious to belong to Protesilaus, who is meant to have died almost as soon as (if not before) hitting the ground in Troy. Yet, trauma experts have examined the statue's wound and concluded that the armpit is a crossroads of blood vessels where important arteries and many veins cross. An injury under the left armpit (unlike the right) would not lead to sudden death, but, when an artery is severed, blood flows quickly, fills the chest cavity, and produces a collapse. Blood pressure increases, the heart beats faster, and ultimately the wound will become fatal.[92] This analysis confirms that this statue could indeed have been of Protesilaus. Although the identification remains plausible, it cannot rest securely on the presence of the wound alone. More useful than treating the figure as definitively Protesilaus is to place it within the wider repertoire of heroic representation available to Imperial viewers. Alongside the numismatic evidence and the more securely attested maritime imagery associated with Protesilaus, the statue contributes to a recognisable visual language built from recurring features such as youthful appearance, martial character, heroic nudity, forward movement, and proximity to the moment of death. What emerges is therefore not a fixed and uniform iconography, but a flexible set of visual cues through which Protesilaus could be identified or evoked. It seems to have been carved to be exhibited in a niche – the front was polished and rasp marks on the back were not completely removed.[93] Jiří Frel dates this statue to the Hadrianic period,[94] while Andrew Stewart, James Porter, and the British Museum catalogue simply date it to the Roman era.[95]

The version in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (25.116) has been dated to the mid-imperial Antonine period (c.138-181CE), is also made from marble, and was found in Rome, near the Porta San Paolo (Figure 23).[96]

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[91] Frel 1973: 120.
[92] Dörig 1994: 72; Later corroborated by Robb Schneider, Dr Elizabeth Bigby (Kaiser Hospital, Vacaville, CA, USA) and ER nurse Caroline Stewart: Stewart 2022: 273.
[93] Frel 1973: 120; Stewart 2022: 274.
[94] Frel 1973: 120.
[95] Porter 2022: 186; Stewart 2022: 269; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1876-0903-1.
[96] Richter 1954: 23.

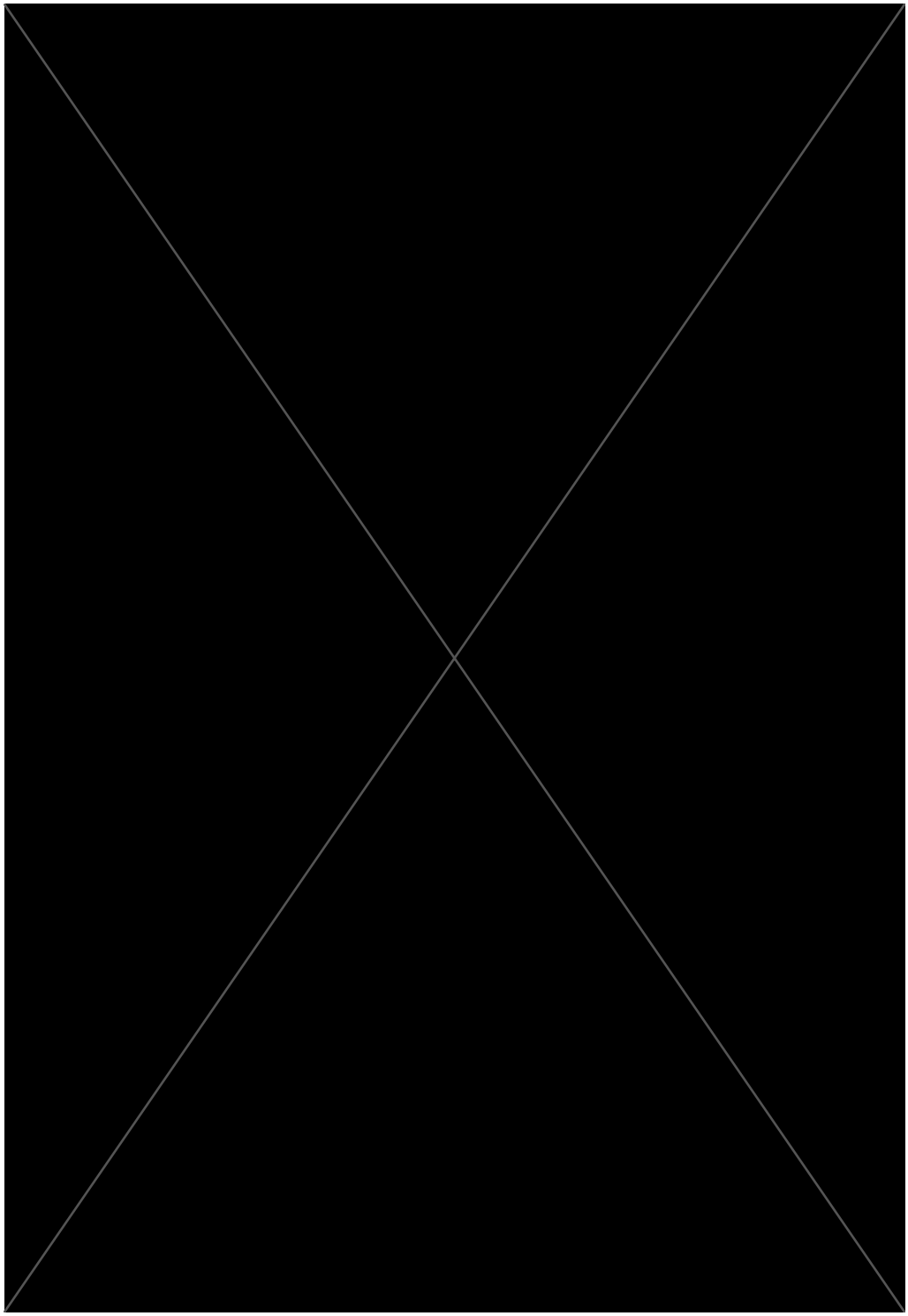

Figure 23: Marble statue of a wounded warrior, possibly Protesilaus. Roman copy, c. 138-181 CE, after a Greek bronze original of c. 460-450 BCE. Marble. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 25.116. Image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/251929.

It was excavated in the early 1920s and acquired by the Jandolo family in 1924.[97] The New York Protesilaus is somewhat simpler than his London brother. The base is undecorated, and this tree-trunk support is an ancient one. Given the tree support, the sculptor has omitted the maritime scenery.[98] Richter points out that the rather disturbing support in the form of a tree trunk would not have been necessary in the bronze original (c.400-396BCE).[99] The feet of both statues are positioned identically, with both bases sloping down toward the front.[100]

The wound under the armpit of the New York Protesilaus (4cm long), discovered in 1970 by Jiří Frel,[101] was initially thought to be a later addition,[102] until the same detail was observed on the version in the British Museum.[103] Until this point, the example in the British Museum was thought to be Poseidon, but the wound excludes that possibility. This, along with the ship's prow, and the warrior in a stance preparing to attack must likely represent Protesilaus and the moment of (or just before) his death on the shores at Troy.[104] As Stewart concludes, "Nothing else fits."[105] The existence of both statues, in addition to the literary evidence attesting to the sanctuary's existence, and the coins of Elaious led Gisela Richter to claim, convincingly, that, with such evidence, there is no need to hesitate in identifying the statues as Protesilaus descending from his ship to set foot at Troy.[106] Given this discovery and subsequent identification, missing parts of the New York copy's torso were completed with casts from the London one (fingers of its right hand, left forearm, marble shield and a large piece of the right side and chest),[107] clinching the relationship.[108]

[97] Frel 1973: 120.
[98] Stewart 2022: 278.
[99] Richter 1929: 28.
[100] Stewart 2022: 277.
[101] Stewart 2022: 271.
[102] Langlotz 1971: 427.
[103] Frel 1973: 120.
[104] Richter 1929: 28-29.
[105] Stewart 2022: 271.
[106] Richter 1929: 29.
[107] Stewart 2022: 269-270.
[108] Stewart 2022: 277.

In both statues, Protesilaus is standing on a slanted base, leaning back slightly, as if to acquire momentum for an advancing attack. In the New York version, he wears a helmet with leather lining, and he likely carried a weapon on his left arm.[109] Protesilaus' advance appears suddenly checked – the hero seems to totter as if he is about to collapse. Though Richter proposed that he was brandishing a spear, Frel and Stewart have suggested that post injury (under the left armpit), Protesilaus is now unable to wield it, and was using it, blade downwards, to prop himself up, in an ironic/tragic inversion of the "classic triumphant warrior" pose (Figure 24).[110]

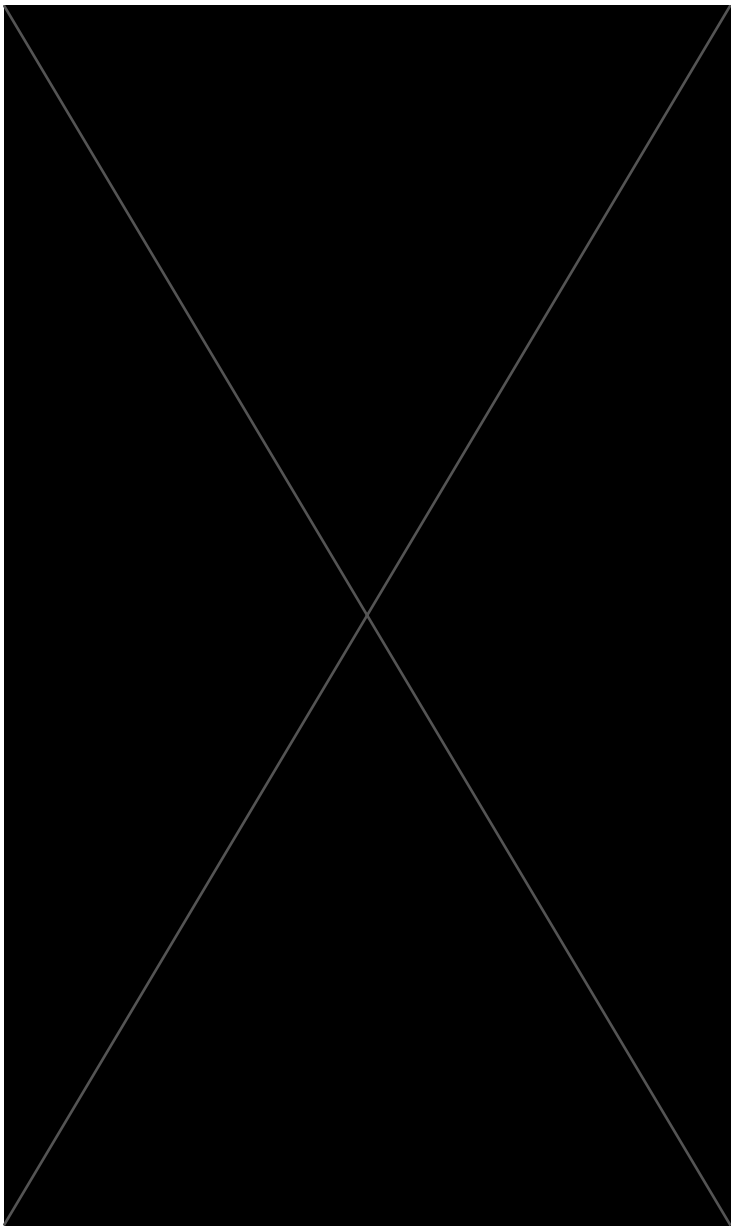

Figure 24: "Doryphoros" of Polykleitos. Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original of c. 440 BCE. Marble, h. 2.12 m. From the Samnite Palaestra (VIII.7.29), Pompeii. MANN, inv. 6011. Photograph by Paolo Villa, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: 02 10 2024 Photo Paolo Villa-Napoli-mann-Museo Archeologico-FO232526tris-Arte Greca copia romana-Policleto Doriforo Polykleitos Doryphoros from Pompeii-marmo marble carrara - Doryphoros - Wikipedia

[109] Richter 1929: 26-27.

[110] Stewart 2022: 273; Waldhauer 1933: 198-200 provides an extensive physical description of this stance; it is also reflected in the pose of the kouros type in Greek statuary: Neer 2010: 22.

A further marble figure in Naples, conventionally described as a “Wounded Warrior” or possible Protesilaus, demonstrates both the attraction and the difficulty of such identifications (Figure 25):

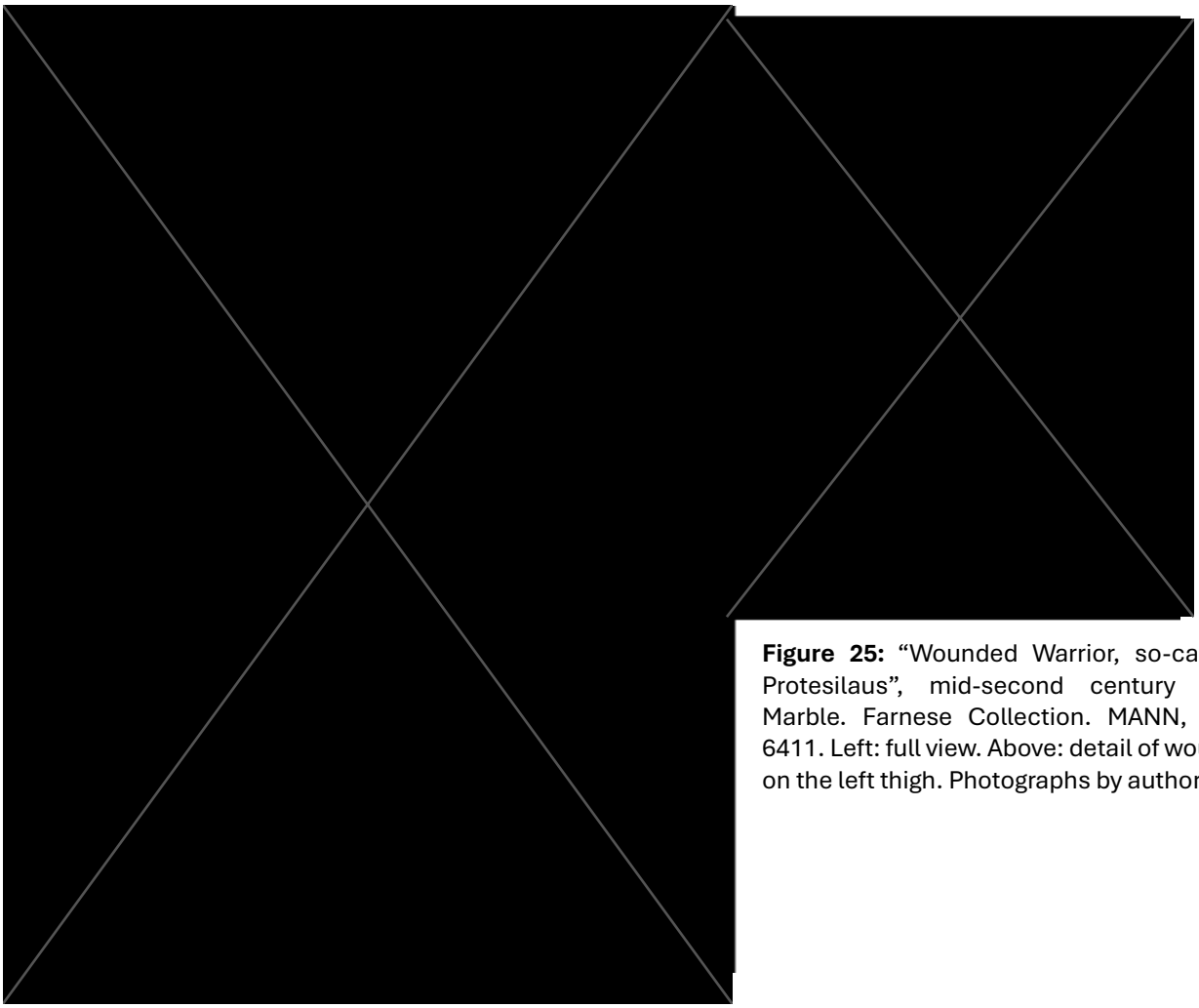

Figure 25: “Wounded Warrior, so-called Protesilaus”, mid-second century CE. Marble. Farnese Collection. MANN, inv. 6411. Left: full view. Above: detail of wound on the left thigh. Photographs by author.

The youthful nude advances with a wound on the thigh, recalling the injury to Protesilaus mentioned by Philostratus (*Her.* 12.4). The correspondence is suggestive rather than conclusive, and the wound does not securely identify an otherwise anonymous heroic figure. The statue is nevertheless valuable as evidence for the broader visual vocabulary through which wounded and dying heroes could be represented. Taken together with the coinage and the more securely Protesilaic maritime imagery, these objects establish not a single immutable iconography but a cluster of visual expectations through which Protesilaus could be made recognisable: youth, martial identity, heroic nudity, movement from ship to shore, and the anticipation or aftermath of his fatal wound.

Against this visual background, the Vinedresser's detailed description of the 'living' Protesilaus becomes considerably more conspicuous. He insists that the damaged state of the cult statue does not concern him:

> ἐμοὶ δὲ οὐδὲν τοῦτο· αὐτῷ γὰρ ξύνειμι καὶ αὐτὸν βλέπω καὶ οὐδὲν ἄν μοι γένοιτο ἄγαλμα ἐκείνου ἥδιον. (Philostr. *Her.* 9.7)
> But that doesn't concern me; for I can see and talk with Protesilaus himself, and no statue could be more beautiful than he is.

The Vinedresser claims to possess something superior to material representation: he associates with Protesilaus 'himself' and sees him directly. The distinction appears at first to establish the superiority of autopsy over image. Why rely upon a damaged statue when one can look upon the hero in person?

Yet the verbal portrait that follows complicates this distinction. The Protesilaus whom the Vinedresser claims to see is about twenty years old, with the light beginnings of a beard, blond hair, a bright and pleasant expression, carefully proportioned limbs, and extraordinary beauty (*Her.* 10.2-4). He is graceful and physically idealised, and the Vinedresser comments specifically upon the excellence of his proportions when nude. He wears a purple military mantle (*Her.* 10.5), while individual features of his appearance are rendered through strikingly sculptural comparison. The mantle that he wears is just like the one worn by the statue (ὥσπερ τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦτο: *Her.* 10.5), and the Vinedresser describes the shape of his nose as angular, "just like a statue's" (καὶ τετράγωνος ἡ ἰδέα τῆς ῥινός, οἷον ἀγάλματος: *Her.* 10.3). Most oddly, his description of Protesilaus' body invokes the appearance of a herm (ὥσπερ οἱ δρομικοὶ τῶν ἑρμῶν: *Her.* 10.4). The Vinedresser seems to use the statue to invent his description of Protesilaus. The supposedly immediate, living body of Protesilaus is therefore repeatedly made intelligible through the language and conventions of visual representation.

The military mantle is especially suggestive when placed alongside the surviving heroic statuary, in which a short cloak is draped from the shoulder on all three surviving representations, and accompanies heroic nudity and martial identity. So too are Protesilaus' youth, bodily proportions, and idealised beauty. Though none of these

correspondences proves that Philostratus copied a particular surviving statue, such a claim is not necessary. More important is the cumulative effect – the Vinedresser's supposedly unique personal vision resembles the kinds of visual forms through which an Imperial audience could already recognise Protesilaus and heroic youth more generally. His epiphany is described as though it transcends the inadequate cult image, while the verbal reconstruction of the hero continues to depend upon a pre-existing sculptural vocabulary.

This tension becomes more significant when the remarkable materiality of the apparition is considered. Protesilaus is described as a φάσμα (*Her.* 4.2) and as separated from his mortal body (*Her.* 7.3), yet the Vinedresser attributes to him conspicuously corporeal qualities. He can be embraced and kissed (*Her.* 11.2); his footsteps can be measured on the racecourse (*Her.* 13.2–3); he exercises, farms, cuts flowers, heals disease, offers advice, and participates physically in the landscape surrounding his sanctuary. His presence even affects the natural environment: the flowers associated with him become more beautiful (*Her.* 11.3). Through this accumulation of sensory and physical detail, the Vinedresser gives the otherwise incorporeal apparition a physical and tangible material presence.

This is precisely where Protesilaus' pre-existing iconography becomes important for interpreting the Vinedresser's account. The description is not constructed *ex nihilo*. The hero already possesses a mythic history in which images substitute for his absent body; a cult landscape that makes his story visible in tomb, shrine, vegetation, and statue; and an iconographic tradition that repeatedly represents him as a youthful warrior associated with the moment of disembarkation and death. The Vinedresser's visual reconstruction draws these associations together and presents their product as personal autopsy. What he claims to have seen bears striking resemblance to what his culture has already taught him, and Philostratus' reader, to expect Protesilaus to look like.

Protesilaus' iconography consequently performs a double function within the *Heroicus*. Familiar visual features lend the Vinedresser's account plausibility. His Protesilaus resembles the hero whom an educated Imperial reader might already expect to

encounter through cult, monument, coinage, myth, and statuary. The material landscape likewise surrounds the Vinedresser with apparently corroborative signs: the hero's body lies beneath the mound; his premature death is reenacted by the trees; his sanctuary marks the persistence of his cult; his statue fixes his defining mythic action in material form. Within such an environment, the claim that Protesilaus remains present can be made culturally plausible.

Yet precisely the same familiarity also exposes the reconstructive character of the Vinedresser's supposed autopsy. What he presents as unprecedented personal access repeatedly coincides with inherited forms through which Protesilaus was already culturally visible. The result is a kind of infinite representational recursion – the Vinedresser claims direct autopsy of a hero whose supposedly immediate appearance is itself recognisable precisely because it reproduces forms already familiar from earlier visual culture. His insistence that he has no need of the statue because he sees the hero himself is especially revealing: the 'living' Protesilaus who supposedly renders the statue redundant is nevertheless described in markedly sculptural terms. Philostratus can therefore exploit his audience's iconographic knowledge in two directions at once. It helps make the apparition recognisable and persuasive, while simultaneously allowing the educated reader to perceive how thoroughly the Vinedresser's vision has been assembled from familiar cultural materials which has been furnished in the cultural imaginary long before any 'autopsy' occurs.

The significance of the sanctuary extends beyond Protesilaus himself. His tomb, shrine, statue, and surrounding landscape provide the first sustained example in the *Heroicus* of a broader pattern in which heroic manifestations are attached to places marked by memory and monument. The Vinedresser later claims that the heroes of the Trojan War continue to be seen on the plain of Ilion (*Her.* 18.2), while accounts of Ajax, Hector, Palamedes, Patroclus, and Achilles similarly associate heroic presence with tombs, sanctuaries, statues, or other material traces of cult. Protesilaus therefore establishes at the opening of the dialogue a relationship between sacred space, material representation, and epiphany that the remainder of the work repeatedly develops. The statue does not itself become the hero, but rather, the landscape in which the statue

stands supplies the visual, cultic, and mnemonic conditions through which the Vinedresser can make the hero appear present.

The importance of this distinction will become clearer in the following discussion of epiphany. For now, Protesilaus demonstrates the extent to which the Vinedresser's purportedly immediate access to the heroic past is already mediated through a material and visual culture. His autopsy is presented as superior to representation, but its very intelligibility depends upon representation. Philostratus' reader is therefore placed in a more complicated position than the Phoenician: invited to recognise the cultural plausibility of the Vinedresser's account while also perceiving the limited visual conventions from which his supposedly direct experience has been constructed.

EPIPHANY AND THE NUMINOUS LANDSCAPE

The *Heroicus'* representation of Protesilaus draws upon a broader Graeco-Roman cultural framework in which encounters with divine or heroic presence could be understood through the phenomenon of epiphany. Before turning to the role that *enargeia* plays in the Vinedresser's persuasion of the Phoenician, it is therefore necessary to establish the cultural assumptions that make this experience plausible. Epiphany provided an established model through which an otherwise absent divine or heroic figure might become perceptible to a mortal viewer, often through a combination of sacred place, cult practice, material representation, and sensory experience.[111] In the *Heroicus*, Philostratus repeatedly situates such manifestations within landscapes already marked by tombs, shrines, statues, altars, and other material traces of the heroic dead. The importance of these monuments lies not in their literally becoming the heroes themselves, but in their marking the places at which heroic presence can be encountered.

As Verity Platt has demonstrated, the prose literature of the second and third centuries CE contains some of antiquity's most sustained and sophisticated discussions of the

[111] Platt 2011: 7.

relationship between gods and their images.[112] Epiphany is especially important within this discourse because it negotiates the gap between an invisible or absent divinity and a manifestation perceptible to human senses. Images, texts, and sacred spaces could all participate in producing such encounters.[113] Philostratus' own works repeatedly explore this relationship between representation and animation. In the *Imagines*, for example, anthropomorphic divine forms are continually presented as possessing a potential for agency and presence.[114] The *Heroicus* develops the same cultural possibility through its heroes, whose continued existence is repeatedly registered not in arbitrary locations but at places already saturated with cult and memory.

Protesilaus provides the clearest initial example. As discussed above, the tomb, shrine, cult statue, and even the vegetation surrounding his sanctuary render his biography materially legible before the hero himself appears. Protesilaus' presence is therefore not confined to the apparition described by the Vinedresser; it has seemingly permeated the surrounding environment. This pattern recurs throughout the dialogue. Heroic tombs and sanctuaries are not represented merely as passive memorials but as spaces in which the continuing agency of their occupants can become perceptible.

At Ajax's tomb, a group of Trojan shepherds insult the hero, calling him an enemy of Hector, Troy, and their flocks. Ajax responds from the tomb itself: he shouts and shakes his armour, terrifying the men into flight (*Her.* 18.3-5). The surrounding landscape likewise bears signs of his dangerous numinosity, including the unhealthy and indigestible grass associated with his burial place which endangers the local flocks (*Her.* 18.3). As with the prematurely dying elms of Protesilaus, heroic presence seems to extend beyond the discrete monument and into the environment surrounding it.

A later episode makes the spatial conditions of Ajax's manifestation even clearer. Two foreigners play a board game in front of his monument, prompting Ajax to appear and command them to stop because the game reminds him of Palamedes (*Her.* 20.2).

[112] Platt 2011: 7; see, for example, Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 4.50; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.1-3; Philostr. *V A*.
[113] Platt 2011: 217.
[114] Platt 2011: 6.

Behaviour conducted at the heroic site provokes an encounter with the hero whose memory that monument preserves. The statue or tomb remains distinct from the apparition, but the monument helps establish the spatial and cultic setting in which the hero's appearance becomes possible.

Hector exhibits a comparable relationship with his material and cultic environment. During games held in his honour, his statue responds physically by sweating with excitement (*Her.* 19.3). Such behaviour belongs to a much broader ancient repertoire in which statues were reported to sweat, move, or emit sound.[115] Sweating statues, for instance, appear repeatedly in literary and historiographical traditions (Arr. *Anab.* 1.11.2; Plut. *Alex.* 14.8-9; Livy 22.1.8-20; Cic. *Div.* 1.98, 2.58), while moving and sound-emitting images similarly recur across Greek and Roman accounts. The *Heroicus* therefore locates Hector's responsive statue within an established cultural vocabulary through which certain behaviours by an image might signal the continuing presence of the figure represented. Elsewhere, however, Hector manifests independently of the statue. After a youth insults him, Hector is seen directing a river against the offender (*Her.* 18.6; 19.5). The distinction between the two episodes is important. In one, the material image itself displays an extraordinary physical sign and in the other, the hero appears as an autonomous epiphanic figure. Importantly, these instances of statue and spirit are connected by the heroic landscape in which Hector remains accessible.

Similar manifestations cluster around the memorial spaces of other heroes. Palamedes appears to a farmer, chastises him for beating his dog (named Odysseus), and subsequently protects his vines from hail (*Her.* 21.2-8). Patroclus intervenes when two young men quarrel during a dice game near the altar he shares with Achilles, frightening them into abandoning their violence (*Her.* 22.3). Achilles converses with visitors, hunts wild animals, and remains strongly associated with his own sacred island and cult on Leuke (*Her.* 22.2; 54.3; 56.6-10). These stories differ considerably in tone and in the degree of corporeality attributed to their heroes, but they repeatedly locate heroic manifestations around monuments, cult sites, tombs, altars, and sacred territories. The

[115] Strazdins 2023: 237; Mayor 2018; Gross 1992.

dead heroes do not appear indiscriminately throughout the world. Their continuing agency adheres to places already marked as theirs.

The resulting landscape of the *Heroicus* is therefore one in which the material and natural environment has become saturated with heroic numinosity. Tombs preserve bodies and memories, statues preserve recognisable forms, altars and sanctuaries maintain continuing cult, and vegetation itself can reproduce the circumstances of heroic biography. Improper behaviour towards these places may provoke retaliation, while appropriate engagement can permit communication or assistance. These spaces consequently function as points of heightened permeability between the world of the living and that of the heroic dead.

This spatial logic helps clarify the status of the heroes themselves. When the Phoenician questions how Protesilaus could possess accurate knowledge of a war in which he died almost immediately, he asks:

> τὸν γὰρ πόλεμον, ὃς περὶ τῇ Τροίᾳ ἐγένετο, πῶς ἂν διηγοῖτο μήτε διαπολεμήσας αὐτόν, ἀποθανών τε πρῶτος τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ παντὸς ἐν αὐτῇ, φασί, τῇ ἀποβάσει; (Philostr. *Her.* 7.1-2)
> For how could he tell me about the war that took place at Troy when he did not fight in it, but was, as they say, the first Greek to be killed at the very moment he landed?

The Vinedresser dismisses the objection as εὔηθες, "simple-minded" or "silly",[116] and explains that death has increased rather than diminished Protesilaus' capacity for knowledge. Once purified from the mortal body, the soul no longer needs to acquire knowledge indirectly through images and approximations but can communicate openly with the gods and observe mortal affairs free from bodily limitations (*Her.* 7.3). Protesilaus is consequently endowed with prophetic wisdom and oracular insight. As Janet Downie observes, the intellectual discussion of heroic tradition that dominates the *Heroicus* is ultimately "framed and underwritten by numinous, heroic presence".[117] The Phoenician accepts this explanation and later refers to Protesilaus as divine (*Her.* 43.3).

[116] LSJ, s.v. εὐήθεια.
[117] Downie 2024: 207.

The language is especially important in the context of the dialogue's wider concern with representation. Purified souls encounter the gods οὐκ ἀγάλματα θεραπεύουσαι καὶ ὑπονοίας, "not by *worshipping* statues and conjectures," but through direct association with them, and they are able to "see" mortal affairs (τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὁρῶσιν: *Her.* 7.3). Philostratus initially constructs privileged knowledge as something that transcends representation. Protesilaus no longer requires the mediation of an ἄγαλμα because death has granted him more immediate access. This makes the Vinedresser's later dependence upon sculptural language to describe the supposedly directly encountered Protesilaus both particularly conspicuous and ironic.

Philostratus' near-contemporary Maximus of Tyre offers a useful parallel for understanding this intermediary heroic status. Maximus describes a secondary race of immortal beings, *daimones*, who inhabit the space between heaven and earth and are more closely related than humans to the gods while remaining more closely involved than the gods in human affairs (*Dial.* 8.8). These beings are capable of appearing to mortals (φανταζόμενον).[118] The *Heroicus* articulates a similar hierarchy when it states that "the gods know everything; but the heroes know less than the gods and more than humans" (*Her.* 16.5). Heroes therefore occupy a particularly suitable position for epiphany: their former mortality leaves material traces upon the earth in the form of bodies, tombs, sanctuaries, and statues, while their posthumous condition grants them forms of knowledge and agency unavailable to ordinary mortals. Platt similarly emphasises the greater accessibility of heroic corporeality to human senses, even while heroic manifestations remain elusive and spectral.[119]

This distinction is especially important for Protesilaus. His cult statue does not need to animate or contain him for the Vinedresser's account to draw plausibility from its presence. Indeed, the Vinedresser explicitly distinguishes the worn cult image from the more beautiful hero whom he claims to see directly (*Her.* 9.7). The statue is therefore not itself the source of Protesilaus' superior knowledge, nor is the apparition a resurrected

[118] Platt 2011: 235.
[119] Platt 2011: 238.

statue. Rather, tomb, shrine, statue, and sacred landscape collectively mark the site of Protesilaus' continuing cultic presence. Epiphany supplies the culturally intelligible mechanism through which that presence may become an encounter with the hero himself.[120]

The *Heroicus* consequently moves between several distinct forms of heroic agency. Sometimes a statue itself exhibits an extraordinary sign, as when Hector sweats. Sometimes sound emerges from a tomb, as when Ajax shouts and shakes his armour. Other times, the hero appears independently and interacts with the surrounding world. Their cumulative effect is to place the Vinedresser's extraordinary claims on a continuum of culturally recognisable possibilities. Ancient traditions already allowed statues to sweat, move, speak, or otherwise manifest apparent agency, and even entertained the possibility that images might need to be physically restrained lest they depart.[121] Favorinus asserts in the *Corinthian Oration* that his own statue fled Corinth rather than being removed, even while insisting that no statue had actually moved of its own accord since the age of Daedalus.[122] The tension between belief and irreverence established in the preceding section is therefore present here too.

An instructive and corroborative example is provided by the so-called Colossus of Memnon at Egyptian Thebes. One of the colossal statues of Amenhotep III became famous in the Imperial period for emitting a sound at sunrise and was subsequently identified with the Homeric Memnon. The phenomenon attracted visitors over several centuries, including Strabo, Germanicus, Hadrian, and Septimius Severus.[123] Visitors travelled to the monument specifically hoping to hear the statue and frequently recorded successful encounters in inscriptions carved upon it. More than one hundred Greek and Latin inscriptions survive from approximately 20-205CE,[124] many of them in verse,[125]

[120] Platt 2011: 241-242.
[121] Strazdins 2023: 237; Mayor 2018; Gross 1992.
[122] Strazdins 2023: 237.
[123] Strabo visited the statues in c. 24BCE (Strabo 17.1.46), Germanicus in 19CE (Tac. *Ann.* 2.61), Hadrian in 130 CE (Bernand 1960, nos. 28-31; Bowersock 1984: 27), and Septimius Severus in 199CE (*SHA Sev.* 17.4).
[124] Bowersock 1984: 22; Rosenmeyer 2018: 7.
[125] Rosenmeyer 2018: 6.

ranging from brief declarations equivalent to "I heard Memnon" to elaborate literary compositions.[126] These inscriptions demonstrate that the encounter was not understood simply as casual sightseeing. Many belong to the category of *proskynemata*, inscriptions associated with acts of religious devotion and commemoration.[127] Whatever the uncertain origins of the identification of Amenhotep's statue with the Homeric hero,[128] that association allowed Imperial visitors to experience the monument as a tangible point of connection with the epic past.[129] Hearing the statue was interpreted as a favourable response from the divine or heroic figure,[130] and the act of recording the experience transformed sensory encounter into written testimony. Significantly, contemporary descriptions focus overwhelmingly upon the statue's sound rather than upon the inscriptions already covering it,[131] suggesting that visitors principally valued the perceptible manifestation of Memnon himself.[132] This emphasis on sound recalls Laodamia's earlier fantasy that the addition of *sonus* alone would be enough to transform Protesilaus' waxen image into the hero himself. In both cases, sound marks the threshold at which representation begins to obtain the force of presence. Yet their own compulsion to add further writing to the monument demonstrates the continuing interaction of image, sound, text, viewer, and sacred experience.[133] Philostratus' own treatment of Memnon in the *In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana* is particularly illuminating. There the statue responds to the rising sun: as the ray touches its lips, it speaks, and its eyes appear to turn cheerfully towards the light (*V A* 6.4). Material image, sacred setting, sensory response, and apparent animation converge in a single epiphanic moment. The phenomenon, and its widespread popularity, demonstrates the cultural plausibility of approaching a heroic monument in expectation that it might provide a perceptible sign of continued agency.

[126] Rosenmeyer 2018: 6; a complete catalogue of the Greek and Latin inscriptions of the Memnon colossus is collected in Bernand and Bernand 1960.
[127] Rosenmeyer 2018: 22.
[128] Rosenmeyer 2018: 14.
[129] Rosenmeyer 2018: 46.
[130] Rosenmeyer 2018: 19.
[131] Rosenmeyer 2018: 18-19.
[132] Rosenmeyer 2018: 79.
[133] Rosenmeyer 2018: 22.

The example of Memnon is useful because it demonstrates that such expectations existed beyond the fictional world of the *Heroicus*. Epiphany was predominantly, though not exclusively, imagined through sensory and especially visual experience.[134] Greek theories of perception repeatedly privileged sight, and practices of viewing consequently played an important role in the ways divine presence was conceptualised and experienced.[135] Through images, ritual, and literary representation, the absent divine or heroic figure could be made experientially present.

This cultural framework is crucial for understanding the Vinedresser's subsequent use of *enargeia*. Epiphany establishes in advance the possibility that an absent or invisible figure might nevertheless become vivid to a mortal observer. *Enargeia* operates according to an analogous visual logic: its persuasive force depends upon making something narrated (and absent) appear as though it were placed before the eyes.[136] Yet the mechanism is verbal. Ekphrastic language attempts to generate through words the vividness and immediacy associated with visual encounter, demonstrating the mutually reinforcing relationship between literary and visual representation that Platt identifies within the wider culture of epiphany.[137]

Philostratus' works repeatedly explore precisely this relationship between vision and knowledge and the capacity of literature to mediate between them.[138] In the *Heroicus*, the Vinedresser does not merely tell the Phoenician that heroic epiphany is possible. He situates his stories within a cultural world in which tombs, statues, cult sites, sacred landscapes, and extraordinary sensory phenomena already render such encounters intelligible. The sophistication and prevalence of ancient discussions of epiphany attest to the extent of this cultural preoccupation.[139] Sight in particular could offer a privileged means of experiencing, recovering, or renegotiating the mythological past.[140]

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[134] Platt 2011: 248; for sonic epiphanies, compare the shouts of encouragement heard at the battle of Salamis (Hdt. 8.84.2), and Zeus' thunderclaps and Hecate's howling hounds at Stratonikeia (*I. Stratonikeia* 10): Platt 2011: 10.
[135] Platt 2011: 10-11.
[136] Platt 2011: 231, 13.
[137] Platt 2011: 4, 7, 246.
[138] Platt 2011: 250.
[139] Platt 2011: 23.
[140] Platt 2011: 239.

The Vinedresser can therefore draw upon epiphany as an established model of personal encounter before attempting to reproduce something analogous for the Phoenician through language. The Phoenician does not himself witness Protesilaus' appearances. What he receives is the Vinedresser's verbal account of them. Yet because epiphany already provides a culturally plausible model for the transformation of absence into sensory presence, vivid narration can begin to approximate the authority of personal experience. The next stage of the Vinedresser's persuasion is thus not to provide the Phoenician with literal autopsy, but to construct through *enargeia* an experience that can function as its verbal substitute: a kind of virtual epiphany produced through *enargeia*.

ENARGEIA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTOPSY

At First Glance: Constructing Visual Authority

ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν. (Hom. *Il.* 2.486)
We hear only a rumour and know nothing.[141]

The problem that drives the *Heroicus* is established explicitly by the Phoenician himself. As discussed above, sight occupied a privileged position within Graeco-Roman theories of knowledge; autopsy appeared to offer an immediacy unavailable to information received through report. Philostratus builds this distinction directly into the dialogue. The Phoenician does not reject stories simply because they are marvellous; rather, he objects to the chain of mediation through which such stories reach him. Early in his conversation with the Vinedresser, he explains:

> ΦΟΙΝ. Δοκῶ μοι καὶ κατ' ἀρχὰς τῶν λόγων ὡμολογηκέναι πρὸς σὲ τὸ ἐμαυτοῦ πάθος· φημὶ γὰρ ἀπίστως διακεῖσθαι πρὸς τὰ μυθώδη. τὸ δὲ αἴτιον· οὐδενί πω ἑωρακότι αὐτὰ ξυγγέγονα, ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἑτέρου ἀκηκοέναι φησίν, ὁ δὲ οἴεσθαι, τὸν δὲ ποιητὴς ἐπαίρει. (Philostr. *Her.* 7.9)
> I believe I admitted to you my feeling, as we started our talk: I declare I am inclined to distrust mythical stories. The reason is this: I've never yet met anyone who was an eyewitness to them, but rather one says he heard it from someone else; another says he imagines it so, and still another is excited by some poet.

[141] Translated by A.T. Murray.

The opposition is not between sight and speech. What the Phoenician rejects is verbal testimony that cannot ultimately be traced back to someone who has seen. He distinguishes the eyewitness (ὁ ἑωρακώς) from the person who merely reports what he has heard, imagined, or encountered in poetry. Autopsy therefore is positioned at the top of an implicit hierarchy of evidence, but importantly, it remains communicable through language. The Phoenician does not insist that he personally witness every event before believing it. Rather, he wants verbal testimony grounded in the firsthand visual experience of somebody who did. Later in the statement, the Phoenician also connects truth with plausibility. He dismisses traditional claims about the extraordinary size of the heroes as ψευδῆ καὶ ἀπίθανα, "false and implausible" (*Her.* 7.9). The two adjectives are not synonymous: ψευδῆ concerns the truth of the claim, while ἀπίθανα concerns its capacity to appear credible or persuasive. From the beginning of the dialogue, therefore, the question of whether a story is true is closely associated with the question of whether it can be made believable.

The contrast with poetic tradition is pointed. Poets transmit stories across generations through words without offering the Phoenician access to the origin of their information. Homer is especially vulnerable to this idea – later biographical traditions famously characterised him as blind,[142] making the authority of sight unavailable to the very poet whose account of Troy the *Heroicus* seeks to correct. The Phoenician's suspicion of received myth therefore creates an opportunity for the Vinedresser. Unlike the poets, he claims to have encountered Protesilaus personally. He converses with the hero (*Her.* 5.1), sees him, and swears that he will report faithfully what he has heard from him, invoking truth itself as the mother of virtue (*Her.* 7.7-8).

Even this claim is not immediately sufficient. When the Vinedresser asks whether the Phoenician has heard of Protesilaus' appearances at Elaious, the Phoenician replies: Πῶς, ἀμπελουργέ, ὅς γε καὶ σοῦ τήμερον ἀκούων ἀπιστῶ ("How could I have, Vinedresser, since I am listening to you today with such disbelief?": *Her.* 7.11). His scepticism therefore persists even when confronted by someone claiming direct contact with the

[142] Pseudo-Hdt. *Vit. Hom.* 2.7, 2.13; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 166-176.

hero. The Phoenician does not allow eyewitness authority simply to be asserted and accepted. Instead, the following exchange demonstrates how that authority must be rhetorically constructed. The crucial sequence concerns the gigantic bodies and bones discussed in Book 8. When the Phoenician doubts that human beings could ever have reached the extraordinary heights attributed to the heroes, the Vinedresser initially responds with inherited testimony. He recounts what his grandfather knew and relates stories of gigantic remains. The Phoenician immediately identifies the issue with this strategy:

> ΦΟΙΝ. Οὐ μάτην ἀπιστεῖν ἔοικα τοῖς τοιούτοις, ἀμπελουργέ· καὶ σὺ γὰρ πάππου μέν τι ἀκηκοέναι φῂς καὶ ἴσως μητρὸς ἢ τίτθης, σεαυτοῦ δὲ ἀπαγγέλλεις οὐδέν, εἰ μὴ ἄρα περὶ τοῦ Πρωτεσίλεω εἴποις. (Philostr. *Her.* 8.2)
> It seems I was right to disbelieve such stories, Vinedresser; for you too say that you've heard something from your grandfather—or perhaps your mother or nurse—but you say nothing on your own authority, unless you talk about Protesilaus.

The criticism reproduces almost exactly the objection of *Her.* 7.9. A story passed through a grandfather, mother, or nurse remains hearsay. By contrast, the Vinedresser's claim concerning Protesilaus is placed in a different category because he presents himself as the source of the experience. The scene effectively teaches the Vinedresser the conditions under which this listener will accept his extraordinary account.

His strategy consequently changes. The Vinedresser now supplements inherited stories with geographically specific and supposedly verifiable material evidence. He lists gigantic remains associated with the Meropes on Cos, Hyllus in Phrygia, the Aloadae in Thessaly, Alkyoneus near Naples, Geryon at Olympia, and the giants of Pallene and Phlegra (*Her.* 8.3-17). More importantly, he increasingly inserts himself into the chain of verification. At Sigeium, he claims, he personally saw an enormous body exposed on the cape, where crowds travelled from the Hellespont, Ionia, the islands, and Aeolia specifically to view it (*Her.* 8.6). He similarly recounts travelling to Lemnos to inspect gigantic remains there (*Her.* 8.11). The progression is notable and his report gives way to reported autopsy.

Finally, the Vinedresser offers the Phoenician the possibility of autopsy for himself. At Naulochos on Imbros, he explains, another gigantic body can still be seen, and the Phoenician may sail there if he refuses to accept the account (*Her.* 8.12). The same exhortation is made shortly afterwards:

> ΑΜΠ. Ἀλλὰ μήπω, ξένε, πιστὰ ἡγοῦ ἃ εἶπον, πρὶν ἔς τε τὴν νῆσον τὴν Κῶ πλεύσῃς, ἐν ᾗ τὰ τῶν γηγενῶν ὀστᾶ ἀνάκειται, Μερόπων, φασί, τῶν πρώτων, ἐν Φρυγίᾳ δὲ τά τε Ὕλλου τοῦ Ἡρακλέους ἴδῃς, καὶ νὴ Δί' ἐν Θετταλίᾳ τὰ τῶν Ἀλωαδῶν. (Philostr. *Her.* 8.14)
> But you must not believe what I say, stranger, until you sail to the island of Cos, where they say the bones of the first earthborn Meropes lie, and until you see those of Heracles' son Hyllus in Phrygia, or by Zeus even those of the Aloadae in Thessaly—

The formulation is striking; do not believe what I say until you see. The Vinedresser seems to accept the Phoenician's own hierarchy of evidence and places sight above his speech.

Yet the most important feature of the episode is what does *not* happen. The Phoenician never sails to Cos, Imbros, Phrygia, or Thessaly. He never inspects the bones, and the promised autopsy remains unrealised. Nevertheless, by *Her.* 8.18 he concedes that his former ignorance was considerable, he describes his disbelief as foolish, and declares that he no longer doubts the Vinedresser's claims. What has persuaded him is therefore not autoptic evidence itself but the *verbal promise and representation of autopsy*. The Vinedresser has described what he claims to have seen, identified other witnesses, located the evidence within a recognisable geography, and finally offered the possibility that his listener could verify it independently. The potential for seeing begins to acquire the force of actually seeing.

This distinction is critical. The Vinedresser has not overcome the weakness of verbal evidence by replacing words with objects. He has learned to make his words carry the authority traditionally attributed to objects and eyewitness experience. The Phoenician's demand for autopsy is satisfied without autopsy ever actually taking place.

The bones themselves are particularly effective within this strategy because they occupy a different category of evidence than representation. They are not likenesses of bodies but their actual physical remains. Ancient relationships between σῶμα and σῆμα

demonstrate how bodily presence and commemorative marker could become closely intertwined. Tombs and grave markers could act metonymically for the deceased individual, while the early *kouros* tradition developed simultaneously through funerary *semata* and votive *agalmata*, allowing the youthful sculptural body to stand in complex relationships to both mortal and divine referents.[143] Within the *Heroicus*, bones, tombs, shrines, statues, and sacred landscapes similarly provide material points around which claims of heroic presence can be organised. They do not prove the Vinedresser's extraordinary narratives, but they provide those narratives with visible and cultural anchors.

This is also the role played by Protesilaus' sanctuary. Its presence cannot itself verify that the Vinedresser converses with a resurrected hero. The damaged cult statue is evidence only that Protesilaus was represented and worshipped there, not that the Vinedresser's epiphanic encounters occurred. But, importantly, the shrine establishes a culturally plausible environment for such a claim. Philostratus has the Vinedresser use recognisable mechanisms through which extraordinary stories were conventionally invested with authority – material remains, sacred topography, eyewitness testimony, epiphany, and appeal to visual verification – to support an account that becomes progressively more extraordinary.

The movement of *Her.* 8 therefore establishes the persuasive method that will dominate the remainder of the dialogue. When the Vinedresser has finally brought the Phoenician to the point at which he accepts verbal testimony grounded in visual experience, he commands him once again to listen: ἄκουε (*Her.* 9.1). The irony of the imperative is important. The dialogue has just established that sight possesses greater authority than hearing, yet the Vinedresser's only means of communicating his supposedly autoptic knowledge is speech. From this point onward, his task is to make hearing approximate seeing.

[143] On the relationship between σῆμα, tomb, and the physical remains of the dead, see: Steiner 2001: 253; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 108-297; Neer 2010: 21, 58; Strazdins 2023: 126, 200; also, Strazdins 2023: 125 on Hom. *Il.* 23.326-333 and 130 on Philostr. *V S* 1.25.543-544.

Enargeia: From Hearsay to Autopsy

The rhetorical device that enables this transformation is *enargeia*. Ancient rhetorical discussions repeatedly define vivid discourse through its capacity to place absent things before the mental eye. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Lys.* 7) associates vivid representation with the impression that events occur before the audience, while Quintilian describes the power through which absent things are represented to the imagination so forcefully that they seem to be seen with the eyes rather than merely heard (*Inst.* 6.2.29-32). Dio Chrysostom similarly captures the process when he describes speech that makes the speaker seem to see what he narrates and places the same scene before the eyes of his hearers (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2).[144]

This phenomenon is especially significant within a dialogue that has made autopsy the standard of authoritative knowledge. *Enargeia* does more than make the Vinedresser's stories decorative or emotionally vivid. It supplies a means by which the Phoenician's demand for sight can be met within the constraints of verbal narration. Ekphrastic description provides the sensory detail from which an image can be constructed, while *enargeia* describes the effect through which that verbal representation becomes experiential. The resulting imaginative vision cannot literally reproduce autopsy, but it can imitate its phenomenological force. *Enargeia* thus provides the Phoenician with a form of personal, second-hand, manufactured autopsy; he does not see the object itself but comes to experience the verbal account as though he had.

Dio Chrysostom's *Olympian Oration* provides an illuminating contemporary comparison for the relationship between visuality, persuasion, and *enargeia*. Dio Chrysostom's Pheidias argues that, while the poet can excite and cheat the ear through the spell of metre and sound, viewers of images require greater *enargeia* to be convinced, because the eye agrees with exactly what it sees (*Or.* 12.71-72).[145] The *Heroicus* deliberately destabilises this distinction. The Vinedresser possesses no direct visual access that he

[144] Webb 2009: 22; Platt 2011: 231, 234.
[145] Platt 2011: 234.

can transfer to the Phoenician. Instead, he must use precisely the supposedly less reliable medium – language – to reproduce the effects of visual presence.

The Phoenician's own vocabulary demonstrates that this process succeeds. At the beginning of the dialogue his scepticism is articulated through his failure to encounter anyone who has seen the events they describe (*Her.* 7.9). After the Vinedresser begins supplying detailed verbal representations, however, the Phoenician increasingly responds in the language of sight. Following the physical description of Protesilaus, he declares εἶδον (*Her.* 10.5): he can now "see" or mentally picture the young hero. Later, his growing conviction is expressed in similarly visual terms:

> ΦΟΙΝ. Πείθομαι, νὴ τὸν Πρωτεσίλεων, ἀμπελουργέ· καλὸν γάρ, ὡς ὁρῶ, καὶ ὀμνύναι τοιοῦτον ἥρω. (Philostr. *Her.* 16.6)
> I believe you, Vinedresser—by Protesilaus, I do; for, as I see, such a hero is a fine one to swear by.

The juxtaposition of πείθομαι and ὁρῶ is notable. Although ὁράω can commonly be used to mean "I discern/perceive" rather than referring to literal sight,[146] its use here is still significant within a dialogue that has repeatedly emphasised the distinction between seeing and hearing. The Phoenician's "I see" therefore carries particular weight: even if used idiomatically, it reflects the success of the Vinedresser's attempt to make verbal testimony function like visual experience. The Phoenician believes because, at least within the imaginative economy of the dialogue, he now "sees."

The pattern continues at *Her.* 33.38, where the Phoenician asks to "behold" (ἰδεῖν) Palamedes in the same manner as the Vinedresser has already shown him Nestor, Diomedes, and Sthenelus. At *Her.* 48.1, he asks that Achilles be "shown" to him (δείξεις). These verbs describe no literal acts of viewing; the Vinedresser remains a speaker and the Phoenician a listener. Their recurrence therefore marks a transformation in the Phoenician's relationship to the verbal narrative. He no longer merely asks what the heroes were like; he asks that they be made visible.

[146] LSJ, s.v. ὁράω; cf. Pl. *Grg.* 475e.

The transition is especially striking because nothing corresponding to actual autopsy has occurred. The Phoenician has not visited the giant bodies, seen Protesilaus appear, or witnessed the Trojan heroes. His only direct visual experience within the frame of the dialogue remains the landscape surrounding him: the sanctuary, tomb, damaged statue, and physical environment at Elaious. Everything beyond this is mediated by the Vinedresser. Yet the Phoenician's language increasingly collapses the distinction between being told and seeing for himself. Through *enargeia*, verbal testimony has appropriated the vocabulary of sight.

This offers an extension to arguments that place emotion at the centre of the Vinedresser's persuasive strategy. Janet Downie convincingly emphasises the shift from impersonal forms of historical argument toward personal and affective engagement, and the Phoenician is repeatedly emotionally affected by the Vinedresser's stories.[147] Yet affect can also be understood here as a consequence of a fundamental rhetorical process. The Phoenician is emotionally invested because vivid narration has first converted him into an imaginative participant. *Enargeia* produces presence; this presence generates participation; participation produces affect; and affect in turn strengthens persuasion.

Protesilaus provides the clearest demonstration of this process. The material evidence physically available to the Phoenician is remarkably limited. The sanctuary is ruined; little of its former structure survives, the cult image has been altered and worn by time and devotion (*Her.* 9.5-7). Yet from this relatively unimpressive visual object the Vinedresser produces an incredibly detailed verbal, ekphrastic Protesilaus. The hero appears approximately twenty years old, with the beginnings of a beard, blond hair of moderate length, a bright expression, relaxed and friendly eyes, an angular nose, a small mouth, extraordinary voice, exceptional proportions, gracefulness, and a body ten cubits tall (*Her.* 10.2-4). He smells sweeter than myrtle and is particularly beautiful when nude. The discrepancy between what is materially available and what the Vinedresser claims to have seen is central to the persuasive force of the passage. The damaged statue cannot

[147] Downie 2024: 214-215.

supply such information. The Vinedresser therefore presents himself as possessing access beyond representation. While ordinary viewers must make do with the degraded ἄγαλμα, he associates with Protesilaus himself and sees him directly (*Her.* 9.7). His ekphrasis translates that privileged autopsy into a form the Phoenician can experience second-hand.

The transformation can be observed particularly clearly in the vocabulary that frames the description. Before the Vinedresser begins, the Phoenician asks ἦ καὶ διαγράψεις μοι αὐτὸν καὶ κοινωνήσεις τοῦ εἴδους; ("Can you then describe him, and share with me what you've seen?*":* *Her.* 10.1), asking him to "delineate" or "draw out" Protesilaus and communicate his visible form.[148] The choice of διαγράψεις is important. Διαγράφω can denote the act of marking out or drawing a form, and here language is being asked to perform a visualising function. This force is strengthened by its conjunction with εἶδος, the hero's visible appearance or form. The Phoenician is therefore not simply asking to be told further facts about Protesilaus but asking the Vinedresser to construct through words an image that he himself can apprehend. What follows fulfils this request precisely. The Vinedresser describes Protesilaus through a strongly visual and sculptural vocabulary, including ἰδέα*,* ἄγαλμα*,* and comparison with the herms, before the Phoenician responds εἶδον τὸν νεανίαν (*Her.* 10.5), "I have seen the young man." The progression from διαγράψεις and εἶδος to εἶδον is therefore significant – verbal description has produced an experience that the Phoenician himself articulates as an act of sight.

Yet precisely here Philostratus begins to expose the mechanism by which this 'autopsy' is manufactured. The Vinedresser's supposedly unique vision of Protesilaus is described through recognisable visual conventions. The hero's nose is οἷον ἀγάλματος, "like that of a statue" (*Her.* 10.3). The Vinedresser supposedly knows what Protesilaus looks like because he has seen Protesilaus himself, yet he communicates that privileged visual knowledge by asking his listener to imagine a feature familiar from statuary. The direction of authority momentarily reverses. Instead of the living hero validating the image, the

[148] LSJ, s.v. διαγράφω: mark out by lines, delineate, map out, draw.

image supplies the visual vocabulary through which the living hero can be believed. The comparison that follows is still more revealing. The Vinedresser praises Protesilaus' bodily proportions and graceful nude appearance while comparing him to the herms of the racecourse (*Her.* 10.4). The incongruity is difficult to ignore. A herm provides the wrong visual comparison for an elaborate account of a beautifully proportioned and complete male body. The comparison therefore draws attention to the artificiality and fakeness of the Vinedresser's reconstructive process. His description seems less like a direct record of an apparition, and more of a carefully constructed image drawing on familiar sculptural types, visual memory, and recognisable heroic forms.

The broader iconographic tradition discussed above intensifies this effect. Protesilaus could already be encountered through coinage, heroic statuary, cult images, and the established visual vocabulary of youthful martial nudity, cloak, movement, and heroic death. Philostratus therefore does not need to invent a wholly new visual Protesilaus. He can activate forms his culturally knowledgeable reader may already recognise. For the Phoenician, such familiarity helps the Vinedresser's words form into a convincing image. For the reader, however, the same familiarity raises a more troubling possibility: the supposed autoptic description merely reconstructs Protesilaus from the visual materials available within the culture. The statue-like features, and particularly the incompatible comparison with a herm, make this reconstructive process immediately conspicuous and transparent.

The mechanism of activating pre-existing visual forms can be glimpsed elsewhere in the *Heroicus*. At *Her.* 19.5, the identification of Hector's statue depends upon precisely this kind of visual and iconographic reasoning. A viewer interprets a heroic image by comparing its appearance with learned expectations about how particular heroes should be represented. Such moments acknowledge that statues do not transparently disclose identity. Visual interpretation itself requires cultural knowledge, comparison, and inference.[149] The Vinedresser's reconstruction of Protesilaus employs the same process while presenting its result as direct experience. Crucially, however, the statue of Hector

[149] Neer 2010: 39-40.

is misidentified as Achilles (*Her*. 19.5). Visuality and familiarity with pre-existing iconography here is not sufficient to establish the identity of the heroes. The episode shows that visual inspection, iconographic knowledge, or compelling autopsy do not guarantee correct identification.

This produces the central tension of the dialogue. The Vinedresser repeatedly invokes the authority of sight while communicating entirely through speech. He instructs the Phoenician not to believe until he sees but persuades him before such seeing ever occurs. He claims exceptional access to Protesilaus himself but describes the hero through the familiar language of sculpture. He asserts that his narratives originate in autopsy, yet their transmission remains dependent upon ekphrasis and *enargeia*. What appears to overcome the weakness of verbal evidence is therefore itself a verbal construction. The text repeatedly draws attention to this mediation. Protesilaus never enters the frame dialogue to confirm what has been said. The Vinedresser speaks on his behalf from the beginning, even granting the Phoenician permission to sit as though conveying the hero's wishes: Ξυγχωρεῖ ὁ ἥρως χρηστὸς ὢν ξενίζων τουτοισὶ τοῖς θάκοις ("You have the hero's permission; for he is our kind host in these seats": *Her.* 5.5). Once the Trojan narratives begin, indirect speech dominates the narrative and formulations equivalent to "Protesilaus says" recur throughout the dialogue.[150] The authority of the hero is consequently always ventriloquised through the Vinedresser. Even after the Phoenician has begun to "see," the interaction itself remains emphatically verbal; the Vinedresser continues to command him to listen (*Her.* 23.2; 25.18).

The Vinedresser swears that he will transmit accurately what Protesilaus has told him (*Her.* 7.7-8) and later prays that he will omit nothing he has heard (*Her.* 25.18). The need for such assurances itself keeps open the possibility of distortion. At other points he admits interpretative intervention into the material he transmits: "Protesilaus tells a story I find more plausible" (*Her.* 48.13). The supposed eyewitness chain therefore contains multiple interpretative stages: Protesilaus knows, Protesilaus speaks, the Vinedresser

[150] Examples include Philostr. *Her.* 23.12; 23.18-20; 23.24-25; 23.28; 25.2; 25.8; 25.16; 26.1; 26.3; 26.12; 27.4; 27.13; 28.3; 28.8; 29.2; 29.5-6; 31.1; 32.1-2; 33.4; 33.14; 33.19; 33.39; 34.1; 35.9; 39.3; 40.2; 47.3; 49.1.

hears, the Vinedresser remembers, the Vinedresser selects and narrates, and the Phoenician constructs an image from the resulting words. The entire process depends upon the form of mediation that the Phoenician initially declared inadequate.

The visual culture of Protesilaus therefore performs two apparently contradictory but ultimately complementary functions. At the level of the Phoenician's experience, familiar iconography gives the Vinedresser material from which to construct a persuasive and visually coherent hero. Ekphrasis activates that visual knowledge, *enargeia* makes the resulting description vividly present, and the Phoenician begins to speak as an imaginative eyewitness. The cultural authority traditionally invested in sight has been successfully transferred to speech. At the same time, those same iconographic conventions reveal the trick. The Vinedresser's Protesilaus resembles not an apparition inaccessible to ordinary people but embodies the kinds of heroic bodies that Graeco-Roman viewers already knew how to see. The statue-like nose, the ridiculous herm comparison, the military mantle, the youthful nudity, and the broader heroic type all expose the cultural materials from which the supposedly spontaneous vision has been assembled. The Vinedresser does not merely make the invisible visible. He makes the culturally familiar appear personally witnessed. The humour lies in the resulting gap between reader and Phoenician: the Phoenician accepts the Vinedresser's vision as privileged autopsy, while the visually literate reader can recognise the familiar cultural materials from which it has been constructed.

Enargeia is therefore simultaneously the source of the Vinedresser's authority and the means by which that authority can be interrogated and dismantled. It allows language to simulate autopsy, but it cannot transform simulation into direct experience. The Phoenician is persuaded because he comes to feel that he has seen. Yet he has seen only what the Vinedresser's words have coached him to see – a Protesilaus already familiar to the Vinedresser, the reader, and anyone equipped with the same visual/cultural knowledge.

This distinction becomes especially important when the Phoenician is separated from Philostratus' reader. Within the dialogue, the Vinedresser's strategy succeeds;

scepticism gives way to belief, verbal description acquires visual force, and the Phoenician increasingly responds as though the heroic past has become available before his eyes. The culturally knowledgeable reader, however, is placed in a position to perceive the mechanism responsible for that transformation. The next section will therefore turn from the Phoenician's constructed autopsy to the meta-level of the *Heroicus*: the possibility that Philostratus invites his reader simultaneously to experience the persuasive force of the Vinedresser's visualising rhetoric and to recognise the absurdity, instability, and artifice upon which it depends.

SEEING THE TRICK: PHILOSTRATUS' READER

The Vinedresser's rhetorical strategy succeeds upon the Phoenician. By the later stages of the *Heroicus*, the sceptic who initially distrusted mythical narratives precisely because he had encountered no eyewitness to their events (*Her.* 7.9) has come to accept Protesilaus as a privileged source for an alternative history of the Trojan War. Yet Philostratus' reader need not undergo the same conversion. Indeed, the very mechanisms through which the Vinedresser constructs the Phoenician's belief simultaneously provide a culturally knowledgeable reader with the means to interrogate it. The *Heroicus* consequently operates on two levels: while the Phoenician experiences the persuasive effects of the Vinedresser's constructed autopsy, the *pepaideumenos,* or the educated reader, is increasingly invited to perceive the cultural, rhetorical, and visual methods from which that experience has been assembled.

This double perspective is particularly apparent in the Vinedresser's treatment of Homer. Protesilaus describes Homer as responsible for bringing unparalleled fame to the Trojan War and as having surpassed earlier poets across the different modes of poetry (*Her.* 25.2). Indeed, Protesilaus claims that anyone who does not love Homer is effectively out of his mind (*Her.* 25.2). Yet the praise is immediately accompanied by criticism. The Vinedresser repeatedly introduces objections with formulations such as μέμφεται δὲ τοῦ Ὁμήρου ἐκεῖνα ("he finds fault with Homer, however": *Her.* 25.10), and οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα ὁ Πρωτεσίλεως ἐπαινεῖ τοῦ Ὁμήρου ("Protesilaus does not approve of Homer in this either": *Her.* 25.13). Homer is simultaneously celebrated as the pre-eminent transmitter of Trojan

tradition and represented as fundamentally unreliable in his details. Protesilaus supposedly possesses the capacity to correct Homer because his relationship to the Trojan past combines precisely the modes of knowledge privileged throughout the dialogue. The Vinedresser calls him an excellent teacher (τοῦ χρηστοῦ διδασκάλου: *Her.* 57.2) and elsewhere characterises his version of events as "more persuasive and truer" (Πιθανώτερα … καὶ ἀληθέστερα: *Her.* 46.1-2).

This formulation recalls the Phoenician's earlier dismissal of mythical claims as ψευδῆ καὶ ἀπίθανα, "false and implausible" (*Her.* 7.9). The vocabulary is effectively reversed: the Phoenician initially rejected falsehood with a failure to persuade, whereas Protesilaus' alternative account is now presented as both more plausible and more truthful. The distinction between the two terms is important. Πιθανώτερα concerns the capacity of an account to appear credible or persuasive, while ἀληθέστερα makes the stronger claim that it is closer to the truth. By placing them alongside one another, Philostratus allows plausibility and truth to reinforce one another without making them synonymous. This is particularly suggestive within a dialogue that has spent so much time demonstrating how an apparently dubious listener can be persuaded. The Vinedresser has not independently proved the truth of Protesilaus' account, but he has successfully created the conditions in which that account can appear increasingly believable. Significantly, Protesilaus combines textual learning with autopsy:

> τὰ γοῦν Ὁμήρου ποιήματα τίνα φήσεις οὕτως ἀνεγνωκέναι τῶν σφόδρα βασανιζόντων Ὅμηρον, ὡς ἀνέγνωκέ τε ὁ Πρωτεσίλεως καὶ διορᾷ αὐτά; (Philostr. *Her.* 7.4-5)
> Which of the most acute Homeric critics can you say has read the poems in the way that Protesilaus has read and examines them?

The formulation makes Protesilaus into an impossible ideal critic. The choice of διορᾷ is also important. The verb can mean to "see through," "see clearly," or "discern,"[151] and therefore possesses an explicitly visual force. Protesilaus has not merely read Homer but is able to discern the poems with a clarity unavailable to ordinary readers. The juxtaposition of ἀνέγνωκε and διορᾷ consequently brings reading and seeing together within the same description of Protesilaus' critical activity. He is presented as an ideal

[151] LSJ, s.v διοράω.

critic precisely because he possesses both forms of access: he can read Homer as a text but can also assess that text through the superior vision supposedly granted by his condition. His authority as an interpreter therefore depends upon his ability not only to read Homer, but in a sense to "see through" him. In addition to reading Homer, he can compare Homer's representation against a form of superior vision. According to the Vinedresser, death has allowed him to survey events unavailable to an ordinary mortal (*Her.* 7.3), while his subsequent reading of the poems enables him to assess the literary tradition against that privileged knowledge. Protesilaus is thus presented as both viewer and reader, combining autopsy with literary criticism in a manner unavailable even to the most exacting mortal Homeric critic. Homer, by contrast, belongs firmly to the world of mediated report. The Vinedresser stresses that the poet lived several generations after the Trojan War (*Her.* 6) and therefore, possessed no personal experience of the events he described. Later traditions of Homeric blindness sharpen the contrast still further. Whereas Protesilaus supposedly sees the past directly, Homer must depend upon inherited story, poetic tradition, and the Muses.

Yet, this distinction is unstable. Protesilaus' supposedly superior knowledge reaches the Phoenician only through the Vinedresser, and the Vinedresser's account reaches Philostratus' reader only through a literary text. The attempt to escape mediation therefore continually produces further layers of mediation. The extended revision of Homer in *Heroicus* 23-52 makes this problem increasingly conspicuous. Among Protesilaus' most substantial corrections is the rehabilitation of Palamedes at the expense of Odysseus. Odysseus is described as Homer's "plaything" (*Her.* 25.14), while many of the most famous episodes of the *Odyssey* – the Cyclopes, Laestrygonians, Scylla, the Sirens, the Underworld and the divine women who desire him – are dismissed as an extraordinary collection of inventions (*Her.* 25.13, 34.4). The only impressive achievement left to Odysseus is his role in devising the wooden horse (*Her.* 34.2). Homer's preferential treatment of him, the Vinedresser claims, has simultaneously erased the superior Palamedes from the poetic record. He explains that, when Homer was gathering material for his poems, he travelled to Ithaca and conjured the dead Odysseus. Odysseus refused to provide information unless Homer agreed to reward him with favourable representation in his poetry and, crucially, to suppress the wisdom,

achievements, and presence of Palamedes at Troy (*Her.* 43.12-16). Homeric tradition is thus explained not as an innocent failure of historical transmission, but as the result of a bargain between poet and Odysseus.

The first-hand encounter between Homer and Odysseus must have implications for how we read the 'first-hand' encounter between the Vinedresser and Protesilaus. Though the verbal/visual encounter between the Vinedresser and Protesilaus is compelling, the untrustworthiness of Odysseus and his deal-striking with Homer indicates that the fidelity of the Vinedresser's account must be questioned. Homer's encounter with Odysseus reproduces the very structure on which the Vinedresser's own authority depends. Homer communicates with a dead Trojan War participant and uses that privileged encounter as the source for his subsequent narrative; the Vinedresser communicates with a dead Trojan War participant and asks the Phoenician to accept the resulting narrative as a correction of Homer. Both accounts therefore originate in an encounter between a living narrator and a heroic shade. The Vinedresser, while attempting to explain why Homer is unreliable, inadvertently constructs an analogue for his own relationship with Protesilaus.

Even more damagingly, Odysseus fulfils the Phoenician's original criterion for authoritative testimony. He is not merely repeating something he has heard. He was there. He possesses autopsy of his own adventures and, according to the logic established earlier in the dialogue, should therefore represent precisely the type of eyewitness upon whom a trustworthy account might be based. Yet the Vinedresser simultaneously asks the Phoenician to believe that Odysseus lies, bargains, manipulates the literary record, and persuades Homer to transmit falsehood. Autopsy ceases to guarantee truth at this moment in the text. Autopsy ceases to guarantee truth at this moment in the text.

The implications extend beyond Odysseus. If an eyewitness can knowingly manipulate his testimony, the chain of visual authority upon which the Vinedresser has built his own credibility becomes unstable. Protesilaus may see; the Vinedresser may see Protesilaus; but neither act of seeing guarantees the fidelity of what is subsequently said. The problem

that the Phoenician initially identified in hearsay has not been eliminated by autopsy. It has merely been displaced. Seeing may provide a speaker with authority, but it cannot ensure that the speaker uses that authority truthfully.

The analogy is made sharper by the Phoenician's response. By the time the Homer/Odysseus story is narrated, his earlier scepticism has substantially disappeared: he explicitly declares himself persuaded (*Her.* 43.2. 44.5). The reader therefore encounters a striking asymmetry. The more extravagant the Vinedresser's alternative history becomes, the less resistance it receives from the character who began the dialogue by subjecting mythical stories to a rigorous demand for eyewitness testimony. The Vinedresser's construction of imaginative autopsy has succeeded so completely that the Phoenician no longer applies his original standards of evidence to the narrative before him.

Philostratus' reader, however, is in a position to notice what the Phoenician does not. The Homer/Odysseus episode does not merely provide another correction to epic tradition, but it exposes the fragility of the method by which those corrections have been authorised. The Vinedresser's promises of truthfulness become especially conspicuous. He swears that he will reproduce Protesilaus' stories faithfully and exactly as he heard them (*Her.* 7.7) and later prays that he will omit nothing from what has been related to him (*Her.* 25.18). Such assurances are intended to strengthen his reliability, but they also remind the reader that fidelity is an issue in the first place. The Vinedresser must choose, remember, arrange, and reproduce another figure's words. Later in the narrative, he forgets his promises and inserts his own opinion into his retelling, observing that "Protesilaus tells a story I find more plausible" (*Her.* 48.13). The apparently transparent conduit between heroic eyewitness and Phoenician listener therefore reveals himself as a biased interpreter. The chain of authority has become increasingly elaborate: Protesilaus sees and knows; Protesilaus narrates; the Vinedresser hears; the Vinedresser evaluates and remembers; the Vinedresser reconstructs; the Phoenician imagines; and Philostratus finally converts the entire process into written dialogue.

The visual construction of Protesilaus discussed above gives the reader an additional means of detecting this process. To the Phoenician, the Vinedresser's ekphrastic description produces a compelling presence. Yet a reader familiar with the visual conventions of heroic statuary can recognise that this supposedly private autopsy is assembled from publicly available forms. This effect depends upon the reader possessing precisely the type of visual literacy cultivated by Imperial elite culture. The joke is not simply that the Vinedresser says implausible things. Its fuller force emerges when verbal claims are tested against habits of viewing – when the reader recognises a sculptural type behind a supposedly spontaneous apparition, notices the absurdity of invoking a herm to describe bodily proportion, or appreciates the uncertainty involved in identifying heroic statues from iconographic attributes. Philostratus thus requires his reader to move between text and visual culture in much the same way that his characters move between Homeric poetry, monuments, cult sites, and material remains. Intermedial knowledge becomes a condition of understanding the joke.

The humour produced by these inconsistencies should not, however, require the religious context of the *Heroicus* to be dismissed as fraudulent or obsolete. The previous discussion has demonstrated that cult, epiphany, sacred landscape, and material images possessed genuine cultural significance in the Imperial period. The Vinedresser's story could not exploit these forms if they had ceased to carry meaning. Rather, Philostratus places religious modes of presence within a sophisticated literary environment in which they can simultaneously be experienced, analysed, aestheticised, and subjected to playful scepticism, not by questioning the validity of epiphany itself, but by exposing the ways in which its cultural authority might be exploited.

This combination is characteristic of a broader elite culture in which older sacred and mythological forms remained deeply culturally resonant while also becoming objects of collecting, display, learned interpretation, and literary performance. Idealised heroic and divine statues, for example, were not restricted to sanctuaries. Sculptural types circulated through civic and domestic environments in which recognition itself could function as a display of *paideia*. The same viewer might therefore encounter a heroic body

as cult image, commemorative monument, aesthetic object, mythological reference, or stimulus for learned conversation.

Read within this wider environment, the *Heroicus* demonstrates how readily authentic religious experience and elite aestheticism could overlap. Protesilaus' sanctuary supplies the dialogue with the authority and atmosphere of cult. While his statue and iconography make the hero visually recognisable and Homeric learning provides the intellectual material for revision. Sophistic rhetoric converts all three into an elaborate exercise in persuasion. Philostratus' audience is invited both to participate in this cultural world and to display its sophistication by recognising how it has been constructed.

The result is a subtle demonstration that cultural authority is produced through acts of interpretation. Statues require viewers capable of identifying them, epiphanies require cultural expectations through which extraordinary phenomena can be recognised as divine presence, eyewitnesses require listeners prepared to credit their testimony, and *enargeia* requires an audience willing and able to transform words into mental images. None of these forms carry truth independently.

This is ultimately why the intermedial dimension of the *Heroicus* is so crucial. Read only as an alternative literary history of Troy, the Vinedresser's narrative may appear simply eccentric or revisionist. Read alongside the material and iconographic culture upon which his descriptions depend, its more sophisticated game becomes visible.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, the *Heroicus* appears to participate in a familiar hierarchy between seeing and hearing. The Phoenician distrusts mythical narratives because they reach him through hearsay rather than eyewitness testimony, while the Vinedresser repeatedly presents autopsy as the means by which inherited poetic tradition might be corrected. Protesilaus seems to offer the ideal authority for such a project – he possesses privileged access to the Trojan past, continues to manifest within the landscape of his cult, and communicates his knowledge to a Vinedresser who claims to have seen and conversed

with him directly. Read at this level, the dialogue appears to confirm the privileged relationship between sight, presence, and truth embedded within Graeco-Roman thought.

This chapter has argued, however, that the *Heroicus* depends upon a more complex interaction between verbal and visual authority. Philostratus situates the Vinedresser's narrative within a culture in which sight was privileged as a means of knowing, but in which images also occupied an unstable position between representation and presence. Statues could function as memorials, substitutes, cult objects, and focal points of divine or heroic presence, while simultaneously remaining open to misidentification, irreverence, and scepticism. The *Heroicus* exploits both sides of this visual tradition.

Protesilaus stands at the centre of this process. His earlier reception already associated him with death, representation, and renewed presence, while his cult at Elaious embedded his memory in tomb, sanctuary, statue, vegetation, and landscape. Within the dialogue, this material environment establishes the culturally intelligible conditions for epiphany. Yet the Vinedresser's supposedly private vision of Protesilaus is also constructed through recognisable visual conventions: youthful martial form, heroic nudity, sculptural features, mantle, and maritime associations all recall pre-existing iconographic traditions. His apparition therefore appears at once extraordinary and culturally familiar.

This familiarity is fundamental to the Vinedresser's persuasion of the Phoenician. The Phoenician explicitly privileges testimony grounded in autopsy, but the Vinedresser never actually provides him with the direct visual experience he demands. Instead, he progressively makes verbal testimony carry the authority of sight. He moves from inherited report to claims of personal eyewitness experience, from vague stories to material and geographically specific evidence, and finally to the promise that the Phoenician could verify such evidence for himself. The crucial irony is that the Phoenician never does. Instead, the virtual autopsy produced through *enargeia* comes to substitute for the 'real thing': the experience of seeing is rhetorically reproduced without literal sight ever taking place.

Enargeia supplies the mechanism through which this substitution becomes possible. Through ekphrastic description, the Vinedresser constructs scenes and bodies that the Phoenician increasingly experiences as though they were placed before his eyes. His own language marks this shift: the sceptic who initially complains that he has never encountered anyone who has seen the events of myth later asks to "see" or be "shown" heroes who remain accessible to him only through speech. Verbal representation has appropriated the authority of sight. *Enargeia* thus functions as a manufactured or second-hand autopsy, producing not direct access to the past but an experience persuasive enough to imitate it. The same visual culture that enables the Vinedresser's *enargeia* simultaneously reveals its artificiality. For the Phoenician, these familiar cues make the apparition imaginable, for the educated reader, they expose the seams in the construction.

The dialogue therefore establishes an important distinction between the Phoenician and Philostratus' reader. The Phoenician is progressively persuaded by the Vinedresser's construction of visual immediacy. The reader, by contrast, is repeatedly invited to notice the mechanisms responsible for that persuasion.

The humour and sophistication of the *Heroicus* emerge from this double movement. Philostratus allows visual and verbal strategies to create an alluring illusion of presence while simultaneously revealing the cultural and rhetorical machinery upon which that illusion depends. Such play is particularly suited to an Imperial elite culture in which religious practice, Homeric learning, visual expertise, rhetoric, collecting, and aesthetic appreciation could overlap. Sacred and mythological images had not ceased to possess religious meaning; rather, they could also function as objects of learned recognition, aesthetic judgement, and sophistic interpretation.

The *Heroicus,* therefore, does not resolve the ancient competition between verbal and visual media by declaring one more truthful than the other. Instead, it demonstrates their mutual dependence. Images require language, memory, and interpretative knowledge to become meaningful. Words depend upon visual habits and inherited forms to create

compelling presence.[152] Together, they can produce an extraordinarily persuasive illusion of access to absent people, events, and histories. This is ultimately why an intermedial reading of the *Heroicus* is important. The Vinedresser's persuasion of the Phoenician becomes fully intelligible only when his words are considered alongside the iconographic, religious, and material traditions that make his Protesilaus recognisable and his epiphany plausible. Equally, the humour with which Philostratus undermines that persuasion depends upon readers recognising the gap between supposedly direct vision and culturally manufactured representation. Intermediality is therefore not simply a theme of the dialogue but an enabling condition of its interpretation.

[152] Paivio 1983: 16.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the statement that Roman literature belonged within a culture of viewing: Roman literary texts were produced, encountered, and interpreted within a broader culture of viewing. Therefore, Roman literature cannot be fully understood in isolation from contemporary visual culture. Texts and images occupied the same physical, social, and intellectual environments, and Roman audiences encountered myth across multiple media, rather than within the disciplinary categories through which those materials have now most often been studied. For educated Romans, this intermedial environment was reinforced by an intellectual culture in which substantial bodies of literature were learned, remembered, recited, and discussed alongside repeated encounters with images, monuments, and material representations. Literary memory and culturally acquired habits of viewing could therefore accompany one another into subsequent acts of interpretation. A literary representation, therefore, did not exist independently of the visual forms through which its subjects could also be recognised, remembered, and interpreted.

The cumulative movement of the thesis has been from organisation, through spectatorship, to authority. Chapter One demonstrated how visual principles of scale, centrality, sequence, and spatial arrangement can restructure narrative and redirect its ideological emphasis. Chapter Two shifted from the organisation of what is seen to the act of seeing itself, examining how relationships between viewer and viewed construct identity and generic meaning. Chapter Three then asked what follows when sight becomes not merely a mode of interpretation but a claim to knowledge and truth. The progression from Aeneas, through Achilles, to Protesilaus therefore moves from the positioning of the hero within a visual field, through the dynamics by which the hero is viewed, to the implications of heroic visibility. Visuality thus develops across the thesis from a principle of form, to a process of interpretation, and finally to a source of authority.

Therefore, this thesis has investigated how Roman literary texts and visual representations work together to construct meaning, arguing that an intermedial approach reveals aspects of Roman literary interpretation that have remained invisible

when these texts and images have been studied in isolation. The three case studies of this thesis have tested this initial hypothesis across deliberately different combinations of literary text and visual medium, asking not simply whether correspondences exist between them, but what becomes possible when such correspondences are treated as interpretatively significant. What has emerged is an intermedial cultural landscape in which visual media did not function as simple illustration or as a parallel practice of representation, but in which it formed part of the interpretative environment for literature. When utilised in this way, visuality provides a set of categories that seem otherwise invisible when literature is studied in isolation. Scale, miniaturisation, spatial organisation, privileged viewing positions, centrality, sequence, spectatorship, iconographic recognition, and material presence acquire literary importance when literature is returned to the broader visual and cultural framework in which they were both produced and received.

The argument posed by this thesis can therefore be reformulated at its conclusion. Rather than asserting that Roman literature should be studied alongside visual culture, this thesis has demonstrated what becomes visible when it is. The preceding case studies exhibit that intermedial reading can reveal layers of meaning that neither medium makes fully available in isolation. This conclusion will not now simply repeat the individual findings of the chapters but will weave them together to bring their findings into relation, and to identify what this approach collectively reveals about intermedial practices of interpretation. Finally, this conclusion will consider how far beyond these deliberately selected case studies this mode of intermedial reading might extend.

What Intermedial Reading Reveals

The first insight revealed by this approach is that visuality emerges as a method through which literary form can be understood. Chapter One demonstrated what an intermedial approach can reveal at the level of narrative organisation. Reading the *Ilias Latina* alongside the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* showed that their Romanisation of Homeric tradition operates not only through the introduction of explicitly Roman material, but through the ways in which epic itself is selected, compressed, reordered, and visually emphasised. Both works reduce the scale of the *Iliad* while redistributing its narrative

weight, making particular episodes and figures disproportionately prominent. Compression is therefore not simply a practical consequence of epitome or miniaturisation, but it creates new hierarchies within the Trojan narrative and makes its broader trajectory more readily perceivable.

Most importantly, these processes reorient Homeric epic towards Aeneas and Rome. The repeated and central placement of Aeneas on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* finds a literary counterpart in the *Ilias Latina's* emphasis upon Trojan continuity and the Roman future. In both works, selection, omission, compression, and spatial organisation alter the prominence of the material already familiar from Homeric tradition. Aeneas consequently acquires significance because the narrative and visual structures around him have been reorganised. Read intermedially, the two works demonstrate how changing the scale and arrangement of myth can also alter its ideological emphasis. The poem's visual structures reinforce this teleological movement. Its acrostics connect beginning and end, inviting the reader to perceive the poem's conclusion from its opening, while its adaptation of Achilles' shield transforms Homer's cosmic image into a Roman-centred vision in which Rome and the divine figures associated with its Augustan future occupies the conceptual and visual centre of epic history. The shield is particularly revealing because the *Ilias Latina* also turns Achilles himself into a spectator of the completed object. Like Aeneas before his shield in *Aeneid* 8, Achilles physically bears a visual program extending far beyond his own temporal perspective. Unlike Aeneas, however, he remains an uncomprehending bearer of the Roman future that the reader is able to recognise. The poem thus creates a distinction between what its internal characters can see and what its Roman audience can understand, making visual apprehension itself one of the means through which Homeric history is redirected towards Rome.

The comparison with the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* further showed that compression does not signify simplification. The tablet's miniature scale, multiple possible viewing routes, and synoptic presentation of chronologically separated episodes invite the viewer to reorganise the Trojan narrative through acts of looking. The *Ilias Latina* performs a comparable operation verbally – its dramatic abbreviation of the *Iliad* makes selection

visible, encourages distant episodes to be considered in relation to one another, and gives significance to the inclusions. In both media, miniaturisation therefore becomes an interpretative strategy. Read alongside the tablet, these features reveal a poem whose abbreviated form is not derivative of Homer, but integral to its reinterpretation of him. Chapter One, therefore, demonstrated that visual principles such as scale, centrality, compression, and simultaneity can expose literary structures that become less apparent when the *Ilias Latina* is read in isolation. The visual organisation of myth is itself one of the mechanisms through which Greek epic is made Roman.

Chapter Two demonstrated what intermedial reading can reveal about spectatorship and genre. Reading Statius' *Achilleid* alongside Pompeiian wall paintings of Achilles on Skyros showed that the gaze operates more purposefully than as a recurring theme but as a structural mechanism through which mythic identity and generic meaning are produced. Across both media, Achilles is characterised through acts of looking: he observes and is observed, is concealed and exposed, and appears successively as maiden, erotic object, lover, and epic hero. The instability of his identity is therefore inseparable from the perspectives through which he is captured. By making these networks of gazes materially visible, the paintings sharpen similar dynamics within Statius' poem and reveal how persistently the *Achilleid* requires its reader to negotiate discrepancies between appearance and knowledge, disguise and recognition, and erotic and heroic ways of seeing.

This intermedial perspective also illuminates the poem's negotiation between epic and elegy. The visual tradition demonstrates that different versions of Achilles need not remain generically or mythically separate but could coexist within the same domestic and visual environment. The arrangement of paintings, their interaction with surrounding mythological scenes, and the spectator's movement between them allow an eroticised Achilles and an epic Achilles to be perceived in relation to one another. Read against this visual culture, the *Achilleid*'s generic instability emerges as part of a broader cultural practice in which mythic figures could simultaneously sustain multiple identities and generic associations. The viewer's gaze therefore becomes one of the mechanisms through which epic is elegised.

The comparison also demonstrated that intermedial relationships depend as much upon difference as correspondence. Visual motifs such as mirrors, shields, reflections, and acts of looking provide points of contact between poetry and painting, but Statius does not always reproduce established visual formulations. The absence of Chiron's reflection from the shield episode, for instance, becomes significant precisely because the visual tradition makes such a possibility available. Chapter Two, therefore, revealed that the *Achilleid* participates in a broader visual and intergeneric culture in which myth was continually reconfigured through acts of seeing. Restoring the reader as viewer makes visible how spectatorship, genre, and mythic identity operate together within the intermedial environment of Roman culture.

Finally, Chapter Three demonstrated what intermedial reading can reveal about the construction of authority. At first glance, the *Heroicus* appears to reproduce a familiar Graeco-Roman hierarchy in which seeing provides more reliable access to truth than hearing. The Phoenician distrusts inherited mythical narratives because they depend upon hearsay, while the Vinedresser repeatedly appeals to autopsy, material evidence, and his own encounters with Protesilaus as means of correcting poetic tradition. Reading these claims alongside the sculptural, iconographic, and cultic traditions associated with Protesilaus, however, reveals a more complicated relationship between visibility and truth. Statues, tombs, sanctuaries, landscape, and heroic iconography can lend the absent past an appearance of material presence, but that presence remains culturally produced and dependent upon interpretation.

Protesilaus is central to this process because his pre-existing traditions already blur the boundaries between absence and presence, and representation and embodiment. Within the *Heroicus*, his apparition is constructed from recognisable visual conventions – youthful martial appearance, heroic nudity, sculptural form, and maritime associations – and these make the Vinedresser's supposedly private vision extraordinary while simultaneously rendering it familiar. This familiarity enables the Vinedresser progressively to make verbal testimony assume the authority of sight. The Phoenician never receives the direct visual verification he initially demands. Instead, inherited report

gives way to eyewitness claims, material and geographically specific evidence, and increasingly vivid descriptions that allow him to experience the heroic past as though it had been placed before his eyes. Through *enargeia*, verbal representation therefore produces a form of virtual autopsy. This is not direct access to Protesilaus or Troy, but a rhetorically manufactured experience persuasive enough to substitute for it.

The intermedial comparison also exposes the irony upon which this persuasion depends. The same visual conventions that make the Vinedresser's Protesilaus convincing to the Phoenician allow Philostratus' reader to recognise how that vision has been constructed. The Phoenician is progressively persuaded by the illusion of immediacy, while the reader is expected to perceive the rhetorical, iconographic, and material mechanisms producing it. Image and text consequently do not compete for authority so much as sustain one another. Visual traditions provide the recognisable forms through which verbal description can create presence, while language supplies statues and other material traces with voice, movement, and meaning. This reciprocity provides the clearest expression of the thesis's broader claim that literary and visual culture were mutually constitutive. Neither medium merely supplies context for the other, but each helps produce the meanings and forms of authority available to the other. Chapter Three therefore showed that intermediality can construct not simply authority, but the illusion of authority. The *Heroicus* derives much of its sophistication from making absent heroes seem available to sight while simultaneously exposing the cultural processes through which that apparent access is manufactured.

The three paired case studies also point towards a broader understanding of myth as a cultural repertoire distributed across media. Aeneas, Achilles, and Protesilaus did not belong exclusively to particular poems, paintings, statues, or mythographic traditions. Their identities were repeatedly constructed through encounters with these forms. Each new representation entered a field already populated by other versions, and audiences could recognise, compare, and engage with what they encountered on the basis of that accumulated familiarity. Literary interpretation in such a culture was therefore intermedial before recent modern scholarship placed text and image alongside one

another. The purpose of this intermedial methodology has been to recover something of the network of associations within which those media originally acquired meaning.

The conjunction of literary and visual evidence, then, exposes different mechanisms through which Roman audiences could organise narrative, recognise identity, and evaluate competing claims to knowledge and truth. It also demonstrates that the interpretative value of visual culture extends beyond passages that explicitly describe artworks or invite comparison with individual surviving objects. The implications of the method consequently extend beyond the three case studies assembled here.

Thesis Contributions

The manufactured nature of treating text and image as parallel processes has been established comprehensively by scholarship on viewing, spectatorship, ekphrasis, and the relationship between text and image. In particular, the works of Jaś Elsner and Michael Squire have fundamentally altered our understanding of this relationship, and the importance of treating text and image in conjunction.[1] This thesis begins from this established insight. Its contribution lies instead in asking what follows from this for our understanding of literary interpretation. If Roman readers do indeed inhabit a culture in which myth, narrative, and cultural knowledge circulated across literature and visual representations, how does this fact alter the ways in which the literary texts themselves are read and should be understood?

This distinction is significant. Much of the scholarship concerned with the relationship between art and literature necessarily concentrates upon places where that relationship is explicit. For example, ekphrases, descriptions of monuments, literary responses to artworks, or illustrated texts. The approach adopted here, however, has treated intermediality as operational beyond such explicit encounters. Most important is the idea that literary texts and visual images could draw upon, reorganise, and respond to cultural knowledge that existed across media. Images participate in the process by which interpretative questions are generated.

[1] Squire 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015; Elsner 1995, 1996, 2007; Squire and Elsner 2024.

The broader contribution of this thesis therefore lies in shifting the question from whether Roman literature was influenced by visual culture to how visual knowledge participated in literary interpretation. Intermediality requires us to recognise that Roman readers were also viewers, and that the habits, expectations, and knowledge acquired through acts of looking could accompany them into acts of reading. Visual culture was, therefore, not simply one context among many surrounding Roman literature, but, crucially, it formed part of the interpretative process through which literary meaning could be produced.

Beyond Aeneas, Achilles, Protesilaus – and Troy

The limited nature of the corpus examined in this thesis serves to open this argument to further study. Given that intermedial reading proves productive across these three deliberately different combinations of text and image, it seems reasonable to suggest that this method can indeed travel further. The range of visual interpretative elements explored in this thesis indicates that the possibilities extend beyond those represented by Aeneas, Achilles, and Protesilaus.

The most immediate extensions of this method need not even move beyond the Trojan War. Other episodes offer equally suggestive combinations of literary and visual representation. The relationship between Paris and Helen, for example, provides a particularly productive case. Ovid's paired *Heroides* 16-17 recast their encounter through the conventions of erotic and elegiac discourse, while Pompeiian wall paintings similarly preserve representations in which the relationship is framed through explicitly erotic visual cues, including the mediating presence of Cupid.[2] Read together, these materials might illuminate how different media could participate in the transformation of a culturally familiar episode from an act of abduction into an encounter structured through desire.

[2] The fresco from The House of Jason (IX.5.18), cubiculum (room e), now MANN inv. 114320 depicts Paris and Helen, with Cupid standing between them in a doorway.

Yet, the possibilities extend considerably if the Trojan War ceases to be the boundary of the corpus in question. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* alone possesses a persistent interest in transformation, recognition, and acts of looking that intersects with the rich visual cultural tradition. Within the text, Narcissus mistakes an image for a body (*Met*. 3.339-510), Pygmalion desires a body represented in statuary (*Met*. 10.243-297), Salmacis sees Hermaphroditus with blazing eyes and desires him (*Met*. 4.285-388), and the myth of Medusa makes the act of looking dangerous (*Met* 4.753-803). Indeed, Actaeon's sight of Diana causes his death (*Met*. 3.138-252), and Orpheus' gaze at Eurydice precipitates his loss of her (*Met*. 10.1-85). In addition, the desirous gaze of the Ciconian women results in his *sparagmos* (*Met*. 11.1-66). Likewise, Semele is tricked by Juno into beholding Jupiter, causing her to be incinerated by his thunderbolts (Ov. *Met*. 3.253-315).[3] Many of these mythic episodes have corresponding visual representations found in Pompeiian wall paintings alone (Narcissus in The House of the Ara Massima / Casa di Narcisso (VI.16.15), tablinum D west wall; Actaeon in many numerous Pompeiian examples, including the House of the Menander (I.10.4); Salmacis in House of Venus in the Shell (II.3.3), room 10). An intermedial approach might therefore ask not simply how Ovid represents acts of seeing, but how those representations operated for readers who had likely already encountered the same myths visually.

Of these examples, Narcissus offers a particularly fruitful illustration of what an extension of this methodology might uncover beyond the present case studies. The episode in Ovid is already deeply interested in the instability of visual interpretation. Narcissus is deceived because he does not correctly understand the nature of what he sees. His realisation that the reflected image is not an independent figure comes too late: *iste ego sum: sensi, nec me mea fallit imago* (*Met*. 3.463). Sight, therefore, provides Narcissus with immediate access to an image without providing accurate knowledge of what that image actually represents. Gianpiero Rosati has highlighted the centrality of

[3] Additional examples include Apollo's desire for Daphne (*Met*. 1.452-567): The painting from the House of Marcus Lucretius (IX.3.5), room 20, now MANN inv. 9536, is just one example to depict Apollo and Daphne; Perseus mistaking Andromeda for a marble statue (*Met*. 4.663-752): The House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) had Perseus rescuing Andromeda in its large peristyle, now MANN inv. 899, while another survives in the House of the Menander, room 15; at *Met*. 10.515-518, Ovid describes Adonis by comparing his body to a painted image of Cupid: Cupid recurs frequently throughout Pompeii (V.1.18; VII.12.26, now MANN inv. 111437; VI.8.3/5) as does Adonis (VI.7.18; V.2.21: fresco of wounded Adonis with Venus and Cupids; VIII.3.12).

illusion and reflection to the episode, in which *imago* repeatedly mediates between appearance and reality.[4]

The visual representations of Narcissus make this problem of recognition substantially more tangible. In the House of the Ara Massima at Pompeii (VI.16.15), Narcissus gazes at his own reflected face in the painted pool beneath him (Figure 26):[5]

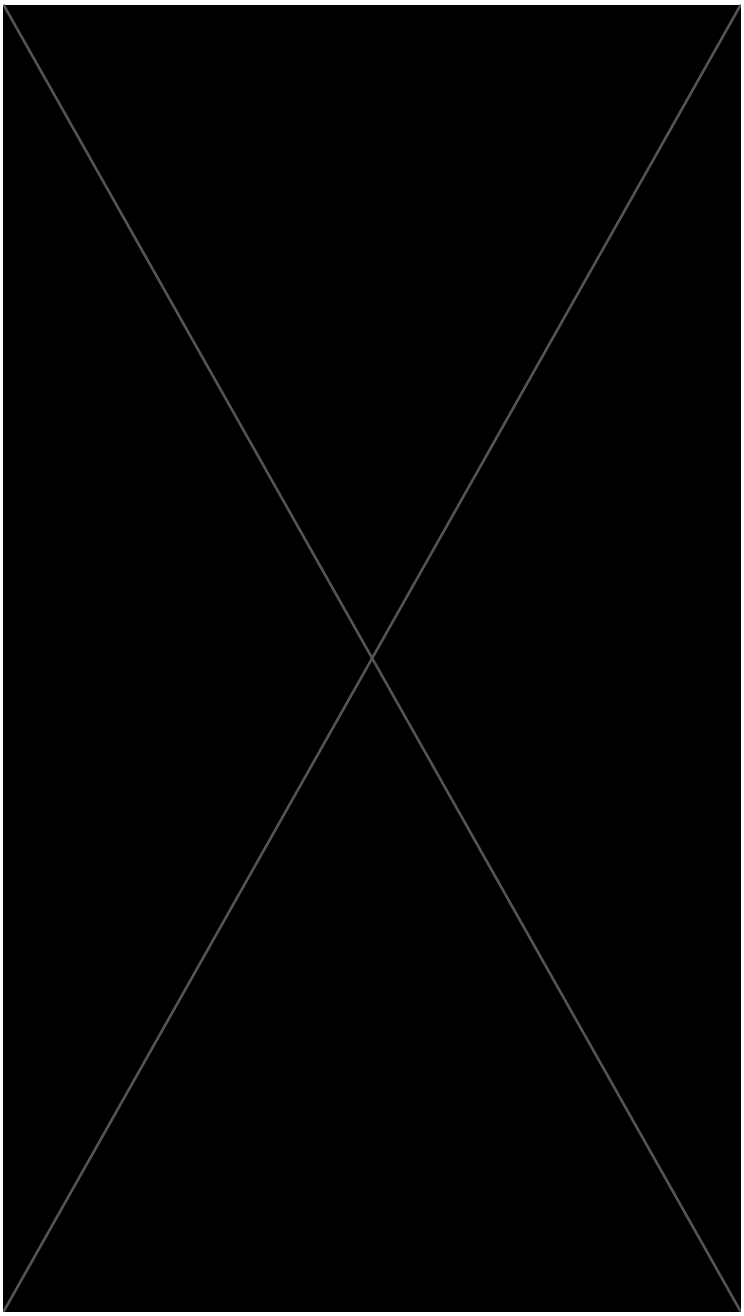

Figure 26: Narcissus, House of the Ara Massima (VI.16.15), pseudo-tablinum D, west wall, Pompeii: (a) view of the Narcissus panel within the surrounding wall decoration; (b) detail of the central mythological scene. Photographs by 'BeakheadIntrados', Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Decoration_with_Narcissus,_Pompeii_VI.16.15_(House_of_the_Ara_Maxima),_pseudo-tablinum_D,_west_wall_-_01.jpg

[4] Rosati 2021: 30-63.
[5] Squire 2017: 246-247, fig. 4.22b; Lorenz 2021: 168-170.

Yet the image itself introduces a further complication. The mythological scene is not simply painted on the wall, but is made to resemble an independent framed *pinax*, or painted panel. Painted shutters open around the image, while two painted supports beneath it contribute to the illusion that the viewer is looking at a separate material picture mounted on the wall.[6] The wall painting therefore presents itself as another kind of image/object while containing Narcissus looking at yet another image – his own reflection in the bottom left of the painting.

The physical setting adds another layer to this game of representation. The painted *pinax* faced the actual atrium's impluvium and appears originally to have stood behind a further basin of water.[7] If this reconstruction is correct, the painted Narcissus, already represented gazing at his reflection within the painted pool, could itself have been reflected again in a real body of water. The arrangement consequently produces a sequence of layered representations: the painted body of Narcissus; the painted reflection at which he gazes; the wall painting that presents itself as a separately framed picture; and the possible reflection of that picture within the real architectural environment. Squire accordingly describes the decoration in terms of different "ontologies of reality and representation" layered within one another.[8] These reflections also potentially implicated the external viewer as well as the painted figure. A viewer looking towards the painting across the basin or impluvium could have encountered not only Narcissus and his reflected image but also their own reflection appearing alongside the painted scene in the surface of the water. The architecture, then, could enfold the viewer within the same visual structure that defines Narcissus' own experience. The viewer in this scenario becomes both a spectator of Narcissus and could also occupy a position analogous to his – living out his experience alongside him. The painting, therefore, extends its game of gazes into the room, making the viewer a participant in the networks of seeing and being seen.

[6] Squire 2017: 247-248, figs. 4.22a-b.
[7] Squire 2017: 248; Lorenz 2021: 170.
[8] Squire 2017: 248.

Bringing this visual experience back to Ovid changes what becomes significant within the literary text. The Pompeiian painting and its surrounds reconstruct the kinds of visual knowledge that Roman readers could have brought to the poem. Its multiplication of frames, reflections, and representational levels suggests that Ovid's *imago* might have operated within a culture in which determining the relationship between image and object was itself a familiar visual activity. The comparison also draws attention to the ways in which the literary text could similarly draw its reader into Narcissus' gaze. His eventual recognition, *iste ego sum*, might also draw the reader into this gaze game. *Iste* carries a second-person sense – "I am that one of yours" – even though Narcissus is here effectively addressing himself. The phrase therefore reinforces the division between Narcissus as viewer and as the figure viewed, while its second-person force may also extend beyond the character towards the reader. The reader does not just watch Narcissus' recognition but may momentarily be enfolded into the network as an implicit addressee, encouraged to identify with Narcissus' unstable position as both subject and object of the gaze. An intermedial reading might consequently ask how such experience altered the significance of Narcissus' gaze, how text and image-in-context implicate the spectator within that gaze, and the eventual recognition expressed by *iste ego sum*. In this way, the concerns developed separately across the preceding chapters – framing and visual organisation, spectatorship and unstable identity, and the uncertain authority of sight – begin to converge within a single Ovidian episode.

Narcissus consequently also brings together several forms of visuality that have been considered separately throughout this thesis. The organisation and framing of the Pompeiian image recalls the concerns of Chapter One. The painted *pinax* establishes a distinct representational field within the surrounding wall, encouraging the viewer to distinguish between the image, its frame, and the material environment before synoptically complicating those boundaries. Framing performs a comparable interpretative function on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*. Its internal borders and demarcated sections, and the inscribed *stelai* partition different episodes and narrative traditions, determining which scenes are brought together, separated, or accorded particular visual prominence. The relationship between frame is particularly meaningful in the tablet's central section. Within the large *Ilioupersis* scene, the prominently isolated

adjective ΤΡΩΙΚΟΣ (“Trojan”) appears near the centre of the object without an expressed noun. The adjective has been understood with πίναξ supplied: the “Trojan *pinax*”. The term subsequently operates across the whole tablet, claiming all of its separately framed narratives under a single Trojan label. This allows for all the separate sections to be understood as parts of the larger whole. In both objects, therefore, the frame participates in organising that content and directing the viewer’s interpretation. The difference between the two is also significant. Whereas the tablet uses framing to order and relate multiple narratives within a miniature visual field, the Narcissus painting utilises its frame to destabilise the boundary between image and object.

At the same time, Narcissus returns to the structures of spectatorship explored in Chapter Two. Like Statius’ Achilles, Narcissus exists simultaneously as viewer and object of the gaze. He looks erotically upon a beautiful body while being the beautiful body that is viewed. The parallel becomes particularly clear when set beside Achilles’ encounter with his own reflection in the shield in the *Achilleid*. There, Achilles looks upon an image of himself where the reflection simultaneously displays the epic warrior he is becoming and the elegiac figure he has been on Skyros. The bloodspots on the shield function both as erotic blush on his cheeks and traces of epic violence on the same visual surface. Read through the visual practices explored in Chapter Two, Narcissus’ desire becomes inseparable from the structures of looking through which his identity is produced. The Pompeiian setting extends these structures beyond the represented figure. If the viewer’s own reflection could join those of Narcissus within the surrounding water, the spectator too could become simultaneously a viewing subject and a visible object. Ovid’s deixis produces a comparable linguistic destabilisation, as the implicit second-person position within *iste ego sum* draws the reader into the structure through which Narcissus identifies himself as both the one who sees and the figure seen.

Importantly, the episode also returns to Chapter Three’s problem of the relationship between sight and knowledge. Narcissus possesses what might appear to be the strongest possible form of visual access: the object of his desire is immediately before his eyes. Yet here, autopsy does not produce truth. Direct vision instead produces the false conclusion that the myth depends on. The external viewer can recognise the

absurdity of mistaking a reflection for an independent body while watching Narcissus remain persuaded by it. The Pompeiian setting intensifies this gap by surrounding Narcissus with several different kinds of image. His reflection appears within the painting, the painting itself is made to look like a separate framed object, and the whole scene may then have been reflected again in actual water. Like the *Heroicus*, the episode draws attention to the gap between seeing and knowing.

Read intermedially, Narcissus thus condenses many of the visual processes examined throughout this thesis within a single myth. Most importantly, the comparison demonstrates the thesis' broader methodological claim: visual culture need not merely provide a background against which Ovid was read. Knowledge acquired through acts of viewing could participate directly in literary interpretation, making framing, reflection, spectatorship, representation, and the limitations of sight newly significant within Ovid's language.

This methodology might also move beyond individual pairings of texts and images altogether. The visual objects considered throughout this thesis did not originally exist as disembodied illustrations. Pompeiian paintings formed parts of larger decorative ensembles: statues occupied sanctuaries, civic spaces, gardens, and domestic collections, and miniature objects could bring together inscription, image, narrative, and material form within a single artefact. The House of the Dioscuri, for example, invites further consideration not only of the relationship between individual paintings of Achilles but of the larger visual structures through which myth was organised across a larger architectural structure. The original context of the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* points in a similar direction. The tablet was discovered in the vicinity of Bovillae, within an elaborately decorated Roman villa from which the Apotheosis of Homer relief by Archelaus and a trophaic monument of Claudius were also recovered.[9] Rather than encountering the tablet as the isolated object preserved in a modern museum, its ancient viewer likely encountered it within an environment already densely populated by Homeric, literary, visual, and mythological associations. Comparable evidence comes

[9] Squire 2011: 66; Fabretti 1683: 316, 383.

from the Villa Aeliana outside Rome, where inscribed portrait herms of Homer and Menander brought together sculpture, written epigram, literary allusion, and the physical environment of elite display.[10] Such contexts suggest that Roman villas and houses could themselves function as composite representational environments in which images, inscriptions, literary identities, objects, architecture, and inherited narratives continually acted upon one another. These environments provided not only the physical space in which different media could interact, but also the cultural practices through which such interactions were activated. Poetry recitations, reading aloud, dining, conversation, and the movement of guests through decorated rooms could bring literary, visual, and material forms into the same interpretative experience. A Roman house was therefore not a container for intermedial objects, but a social setting in which acts of reading, viewing, listening, and discussion continually overlapped.

The larger potential of this methodology, therefore, lies even further beyond the identification of individual pairs of texts and images. To reduce intermediality to such pairings risks reproducing the same separation it has sought to overcome. The wider implication is that ancient audiences carried knowledge between different kinds of cultural encounters. What they had previously seen could shape how they read, just as what they had read or heard could shape how they interpreted an image. Literary and visual media could also be experienced simultaneously within the same physical and social setting. A listener/viewer in the House of Ubonus, for example, might experience its sequence of Achilles paintings very differently depending upon whether the accompanying recitation was drawn from the *Iliad* or the *Achilleid*. Heard alongside Homer, the paintings might reinforce Achilles' identity as an epic warrior and place the Skyros episode within the larger trajectory of his martial destiny. Heard alongside Statius, however, the same images could foreground disguise, eroticisation, spectatorship, and the instability of Achilles' identity. The visual environment would therefore not supply a fixed meaning to the literary performance; rather, text and image could actively reshape one another in the moment of reception. Similarly, a reader could encounter literary texts in a library populated by sculptural representations of authors and their works. The

[10] Squire 2011: 75.

statues of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from Roman Athens in the Agora (Athens, Agora Mus. S 2038, S 2039, and I 6628) for example, were most likely situated in the Library of Pantainos,[11] suggesting a setting in which the physical act of reading could take place alongside visual representations of the Homeric tradition. Unfortunately, these particular organic connections made by ancient individuals are mostly lost to us.

However, in House V.2.10-11 (House of Paccia) at Pompeii, an ancient viewer at one time encountered a wall painting of Phaedra and Hippolytus. They then scratched into the painting a line from Ovid's *Heroides* 4 – Phaedra's letter to Hippolytus.[12] Here, the explicit connection between literary and visual representation is drawn by an ancient viewer, rather than by a modern scholar. Molly Swetnam-Burland describes the graffito as preserving an identifiable historical response to the painting and analyses the resulting relationship between poem and image as an intertextual, and fundamentally interactive, act of viewing. The impulse is comparable, in some respects, to the visitor inscriptions at the Colossus of Memnon, where spectators responded to an encounter with a culturally charged monument by materially recording their own presence and experience upon it.

The importance of this small intervention demonstrates that the person who made the graffito did not merely recognise Phaedra. Literary knowledge was also brought into the act of viewing and used to alter the image's meaning. As Swetnam-Burland argues, the addition of verbal material enabled the mythological figures represented in the painting to acquire a voice and pushed the static scene towards its narrative outcome.[13] The addition of textual labelling also brings the wall painting closer to more elaborate art-text combinations such as the *Tabulae Iliacae*, where inscriptions direct the viewer's interpretation of the image. The graffito therefore transforms the painting into a more explicitly intermedial object, using text to activate and reshape the visual narrative.

[11] Seaman 2005: 177; Thompson 1954: 64; Thompson and Wycherley 1972: 114-116.
[12] Swetnam-Burland 2015: 218-219; the scratching comprises two graffiti on the painting: *non ego socia* and "*no eco*". It has been proposed and accepted that these refer to Ov. *Her.* 4.17: *non ego nequitia socialia foedera rumpam* ("I will not break my marriage compact through bad behaviour"): Swetnam-Burland 2015: 218.
[13] Swetnam-Burland 2015: 219-221.

This instance establishes the possibility that Roman audiences habitually interpreted text and image through the types of intermedial connections explored in this thesis. Here, literary knowledge was not contained within an experience of reading, nor was the interpretation of an image confined to what could be seen on the one image in front of the viewer. For educated Romans, substantial bodies of poetry and myth could be carried in memory through repeated reading, recitation, and rote learning, allowing visual stimuli to activate literary associations almost instantaneously. This viewer, at least, carried one medium into the encounter with another and then formalised the interaction between the two, cementing the role of the viewer in mythic interpretation.

The graffito therefore provides an unexpected supplement to the interpretative processes reconstructed throughout this thesis. The Phaedra painting demonstrates that an ancient encounter with myth could activate knowledge acquired through another medium, and that the resulting act of interpretation could produce meaning unavailable from either representation considered entirely alone. Moreover, the viewer did not seek to keep this interpretation private. By inscribing it onto the painting, they ensure that this knowledge will inform and colour every subsequent viewing experience. Most of these encounters did not leave any evidence behind. While the material record preserves objects and the literary record preserves texts, the interpretive process that joins them tends not to survive. The Phaedra graffito is significant because it makes this invisible process visible and corroborates the methods by which ancient readers/viewers constructed meaning.

The case studies examined here have shown that visual knowledge can better reveal what becomes visible within literature: the organisation and ideological direction of narrative, the construction of genre and identity through spectatorship, and the authority produced through presence and acts of seeing. The anonymous mark left on the Pompeiian wall in the House of Paccia reminds us, if only with a fleeting glimpse, of the countless acts of connection through which ancient audiences may have moved between words and images. In doing so, it effectively transcribes an otherwise invisible internal monologue that many viewers likely also thought. Yet it also returns us to the proposition from which this thesis began: Roman literature belonged to a visual world. Its readers encountered

stories within a cultural landscape in which the same figures, narratives, and ideas could be read, heard, pictured, performed, monumentalised, and embodied in objects.

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