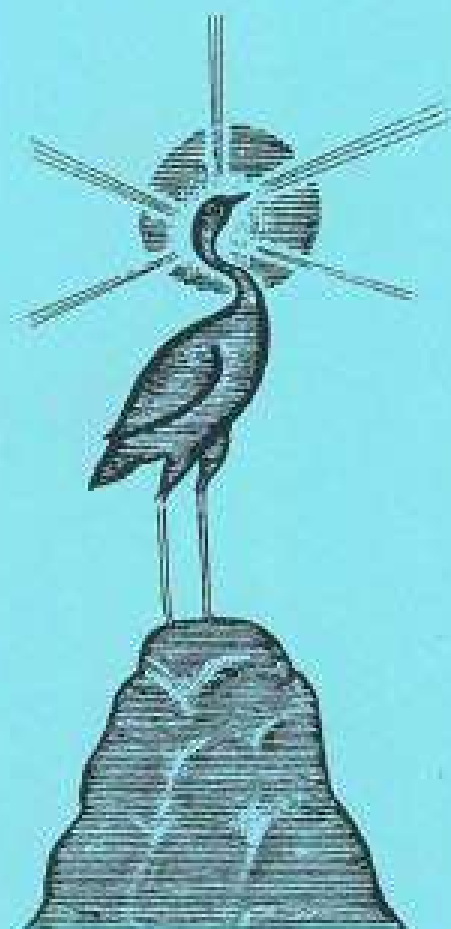


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ACHILLES AS AN AMBIVALENT HERO IN LATE ANTIQUE LATIN POETRY

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INTRODUCTION

NO SCHOLAR DISPUTES that Achilles qualifies as a hero in whatever age he appears, though the definition of a hero has varied among scholars. In a recent study, Raymond Marks (2009: 529) describes an epic hero as “the character around whom the action of the epic principally revolves,” and, in an “ethico-cultural sense,” the individual “who best represents the ethical and cultural ideals of his society.” While the first part of this definition is unproblematic, since the action of an epic mainly revolves around a male figure who can be referred to as the “hero,”¹ this “hero” may not necessarily “best represent the ethical and cultural ideals of his society.” Pertaining to Achilles, this is certainly the case, at least insofar as how Latin poets perceive him in late antiquity.

Scholars have tracked the afterlife of Achilles in Greek poetry,² but there has been less attention paid to his role in Roman poetry, especially the poetry of the late antique period.³ Katherine King (1987) focuses predominantly on the Latin prose accounts of the Trojan War by Dictys and Dares, with mention of Fulgentius’ Latin prose fable of Peleus and Thetis; Zoja Pavlovskis (1965) and Marie-France Gineste (2008) discuss the treatment of Achilles’ education in late antique literature, including Latin poetry; Ruth Parkes (2005) studies Achilles in Claudian’s verse panegyrics to Honorius; and Alan Cameron (2009) includes a brief passage from Claudian’s panegyric on the third consulship of Honorius in his study of Achilles in the Roman world. The discussion below examines how Achilles is represented and employed as a heroic figure in the

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¹Although there can be multiple figures who vie for the status of a hero; see Feeney 1986: 140–141.

²For example, King 1987; Burgess 2009; see also the discussions of Stenger (above, 206–223), Hadjittofi (below, 335–349), and Lefteratou (below, 350–374) in this special issue.

³There is insufficient space here to broach the subject of the differences between the presentation of Achilles in Latin and Greek poetry. For the same reason this discussion focuses on the representation of Achilles in the Latin poetry of late antiquity, though references to some late antique Latin prose works featuring Achilles are made in the footnotes for contextual and comparative purposes.

Latin poetry of late antiquity (200–800 c.e.⁴), both as a positive role model and as a negative *exemplum* or an inferior foil.⁵ My investigation, which focuses on Achilles' exemplary role specifically in the areas of cult and Christianity, *paideia*, and imperial politics, illustrates the resilience of classical culture and Latin literature during the late antique period.

BACKGROUND

The late antique poetic perspective on Achilles, characterized by a general ambivalence with regard to his representation as a hero, was shaped not only by the long Greek tradition but also by the Roman poets of the republican and imperial periods. The creation of a heroic ideal in the form of Achilles partly stems from the *exempla* provided in Homer's *Iliad* of certain types of models appropriate for a Greek hero, particularly one who aims to achieve glory in battle in a short life rather than live a long but mundane existence (*Il.* 9.410–416). Homer's poem assumed a prominent role as a didactic text in late antiquity and the reader was taught to examine it from different perspectives, which included a reassessment of Achilles' actions and conduct.⁶ While Achilles was highly regarded as a warrior in Homeric epic (e.g., *Il.* 2.769; cf. 1.244), he also demonstrated a less exemplary side to his character when he violated the codes of heroic civility by mistreating the corpses of opponents such as Lycaon (cf. *Il.* 21.120–135) and Hector (cf., e.g., 22.395–404, 23.19–26, 24.12–137). This negative dimension in the Homeric depiction of Achilles had repercussions, to a greater or lesser degree, in later literature.

Greek poetry that followed Homer through Sappho, Alcaeus, Pindar, Bacchylides, and some of the Athenian tragedians, largely reiterated the more favorable aspects of the Homeric portrayal of Achilles in the heroic mold.⁷ Toward the end of the fifth century B.C.E., however, the origins of a new trend became evident in the tragedies of Euripides, whose authorial stance reveals a negative posture toward the figure and legacy of Achilles.⁸ This deprecatory attitude toward Achilles as a heroic model continued among Roman poets, especially from the Augustan age onwards. Horace, who exemplifies the various threads prevalent in Roman poetry, takes an ambivalent view of Achilles. While he begrudgingly acknowledges Achilles' valor and courage (e.g., *Sat.* 1.7.14–15; *Ars P.* 120), the negative aspect is dominant, with the fierceness, irascibility, and barbarism of the hero being emphasized (*Sat.* 1.7.12–13; *Ars P.* 121–122; *Epod.* 4.6.3–20, esp.

⁴All dates cited henceforth are c.e. unless otherwise noted (as B.C.E.), except in cases where c.e. is cited to avoid potential confusion with line numbers.

⁵The online tool used to locate specific references to Achilles was Brepols's Library of Latin Texts: <http://clt.brepols.net/llta/pages/Search.aspx> (last accessed 24 September 2024).

⁶On the pre-eminence of the *Iliad* as a didactic text in antiquity, see Morgan 1998: 105–112, 308; Criboire 2001: 140–142, 194–197, 204–205; Hadjittofi 2021: 309.

⁷Cf. King 1987: xv–xx, 1–109 *passim*; Burgess 2009: *passim*.

⁸Cf. Michelakis 2022: 58–143 *passim*.

17–20). The latter characteristics of Achilles are also stressed by other republican and imperial poets, namely Catullus (64), Propertius (2.8.29–30), Ovid (*Ars Am.* 1.681–704), Virgil (*Aen.* 1.29–31, 456–458), and Seneca (*Troades*). This representation of Achilles provides an interesting contrast to the depiction of Hector, who is represented as the real hero of the Trojan War (e.g., Virg. *Aen.* 2.274–276; Ov. *Met.* 13.82–84).

In the late first century a remarkable poetic swerve occurred with the incomplete *Achilleid* of Statius, with Achilles being transmuted from a heroic warrior into a lover and an androgynous figure. Although this depiction of Achilles can be traced back to earlier representations of him as a lover (e.g., Bacchyl. 13.133–147; *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidamia*; Ov. *Her.* 3; Sen. *Tro.* 202, 361–365, 942–944),⁹ it receives its fullest expression in the *Achilleid*. The analysis below contains some discussion of intertextual references in the works of late antique Latin poets, but it should be pointed out that this Statian legacy of Achilles as a heroic warrior and lover persisted in the late antique Latin prose versions of Dictys and Dares.¹⁰ Latin poets who make significant references to Achilles include Ausonius and Claudian of the fourth century and Dracontius of the fifth century.

LATE ANTIQUITY AND ACHILLES

The literary world of late antiquity cannot be characterized simply as either Christian or pagan. The values of the political elite and the Christian church were developed through a system of urbane education that promoted knowledge of the classical tradition and its canonical authors, although some Christian authorities in various parts of the Roman empire objected to the pagan aspects of such a curriculum.¹¹ The system—both formal and informal—was designed not only to shape and perpetuate elite behavior, but also to solidify and even to impose the hegemonic rule of the upper classes upon other social groups in Roman society. The acculturative function of *paideia* in late antiquity involved a process of transmitting Christian attitudes, beliefs, and moral and ethical values, though naturally the extent of this influence varied throughout the empire at any particular time.¹² These attitudes, beliefs, and values were essential to the self-representation of the Roman political elite, to the maintenance of their self-identity, and to the concept of *Romanitas*, a word that first appears in extant literature in the *De pallio* of the second-century Christian polemicist Tertullian: *quid nunc, si est Romanitas omni salus, nec honestis tamen modis ad Graios*

⁹ See Fantuzzi 2012: esp. 39–59 and 125–145.

¹⁰ See, for example, King 1987: 195–201; cf. below, 319, n. 26.

¹¹ See, for example, Stenger 2022: *passim*, esp. 32–42, 57–98, and 239–284.

¹² On Christianity and classics in the *paideia* of the elite in late antiquity, see Stenger 2022: *passim*, esp. 1–98; on *paideia* in the politics and society of late antiquity, see Brown 1992: *passim*, esp. 35–70; see also Stenger (above, 206–223) on *paideia*.

estis? (“Why now, if Romanness is salvation for everything, do you still not display honorable conduct toward the Greeks?,” 1.4). Ultimately the Christian adaptations and interpretations of classical myths and heroes not only served to enhance Christianity’s reach but also to add a measure of cultural authority to the readings and interpretations of these myths.

Late antique Latin poets—both pagan and Christian—used classical figures and myths as *exempla*, either positive or negative, and the boundary between the pagan and Christian worlds was often blurred. Their poetic texts reflected a dual world in which the classical traditions no longer held absolute sway but were being adapted to suit an increasingly Christianized society. Christian poets transformed classical myths and *exempla* to suit a Christian context, thereby adding a moral and ethical dimension in an attempt to influence the beliefs and actions of their readers. Achilles was a problematic hero whom these poets endeavored to adapt somewhat uneasily to a Christian milieu. The themes involving Achilles functioned as case studies on, *inter alia*, the importance of rational argumentation, the need to control the emotions and passions, and acceptable modes of conduct and self-presentation. Accounts of the words and deeds of the Achilles myth appeared in the works of Christian poets to serve as *exempla* of the type of conduct that was viewed as being appropriate or unsuitable for the Christian faithful—what could be termed *speculum iusti* or *speculum peccatoris*, respectively.

ACHILLES AS A POSITIVE MODEL

Many of the references to Achilles in the poetry of late antiquity are incidental in nature and arise in the course of a poet’s narrative about another subject. But in some places even the incidental mention of Achilles suggests his heroic status, as when the late fifth- to early sixth-century Christian rhetorician-poet Ennodius, who was a Bishop of Pavia (514 c.e.), assumes the heroic status of Achilles when he points out how it was he who made his teacher Chiron famous (*Achillis lingua Chiron innotuit*, “Chiron became known through the speech of Achilles,” *Praefatio dicta Lupicino quando in auditorio traditus est Deuterio V. S.* 69.14–16). Another incidental reference to Achilles occurs when Ausonius lauds the poetic talent of the emperor Gratian, who was apparently in the process of composing an epic on Achilles:

*sed carmen non molle modis; bella horrida Martis
Odrysi Thraessaeque uiraginis arma retractat.
exulta, Aeacide: celebraris uate superbo
rursum Romanusque tibi contingit Homerus.*¹³

(Ausonius, *De Augusto* 14–17 [ed. Prete 1978])

¹³Throughout this article, upper-case letters at the beginning of sentences in the Latin text of poetic works have been altered to the lower case; furthermore, consonantal “v” and “j” have been printed as “u” and “i,” respectively, while consonantal “U” and “J” appear as “V” and “I,” respectively.

But his poem is not soft in manner; the frightful wars of Odryssian Mars and the arms of the Thracian maiden he treats again. Rejoice, son of Aeacus [Achilles]! You are glorified again by a proud poet and a Roman Homer is granted to you.¹⁴

Here Ausonius suggests that Achilles is a figure who is still worthy of the attention of an elite Roman poet, citing two of the Homeric themes treated by Gratian: “the horrific wars of Odryssian Mars” (*bella horrida Martis*, 14–15) and the encounter with Penthesilea (*Thraessaeque uiraginis*, “the Thracian maiden”) and the Amazons (15). Elsewhere Ausonius draws a parallel between the situation of Achilles and that of his own grandson:

*sic neque Peliaden terrebat Chiron Achillem
Thessalico permixtus equo nec pinifer Atlans
Amphitryoniadem puerum, set blandus uterque
mitibus adloquiis teneros mulcebat alumnos.
tu quoque ne metuas, quamuis schola uerbere multo
increpet et truculenta senex gerat ora magister:
degeneres animos timor arguit.*¹⁵

(Ausonius, *Ad nepotem Ausonium* 20–26 [ed. Prete 1978])

So Thessalian Chiron did not frighten Achilles, Peleus’ son, though he was quite half a horse, nor pine-bearing Atlas scare Amphitryo’s youthful son, but both coaxingly used to soothe their young pupils with gentle words. You [Ausonius’ grandson] also be not afraid, though the school may reverberate with many a stroke and the old master wear a stern face: fear proves a spirit degenerate.

In this episode, Ausonius encourages his grandson not to be afraid of the stern appearance of his schoolmaster by commenting that the youthful Achilles was unafraid of his teacher Chiron, as was Hercules of his tutor Atlas.

Cult and Christianity

During late antiquity, one of the most obvious ways in which Achilles is represented as a positive model or *exemplum* occurs in iconography, which served as a complement to poetry in the depiction of Achilles. This iconography depicted Achilles as having received the same *paideia* that enabled the emperor and the Roman elites to carry out their civic responsibilities and to safeguard the *mos maiorum*.¹⁶ The importance of this iconography was also partly a reflection

¹⁴All translations of the Latin text are mine.

¹⁵The *sententia* in this line repeats the phrase of Virgil in *Aen.* 4.13.

¹⁶The fifth-century illuminated manuscript known as the “Ambrosian *Iliad*” (see Ceriani, Calderini, and Mai 1953; Bell 1979a), though written in Greek uncial script, manifestly illustrates this idea; for the Roman iconographic aspects of this manuscript, see Bare 2009 *passim*. Weitzmann (1959: 32, 50), however, argues for a provenance of Alexandria. Other iconographic examples

of the cult worship of Achilles that existed in the Roman empire in both Greek and Roman areas, at least up until the sixth century.¹⁷ Ausonius wrote an epitaph for Achilles that cites one of these locations in Asia Minor:

*non una Aeaciden tellus habet: ossa teguntur
litore Sigeo, crinem Larisa cremauit.
pars tumulis [secreta iacet, pars] classe [relata est;]
orbe set in toto [rediuiuum ostendet Homerus].*

(Ausonius, *Achilli* 1–4 [ed. Evelyn-White 1919])

Not one land holds the descendant of Aeacus [Achilles]: his bones are buried
on the Sigean shore and at Larissa his hair was burned.
Part of him lies hidden in a tomb; part was carried home by the fleet.
But in the entire world Homer shows him alive again.

The phrase *litore Sigeo* (“on the Sigean shore”) refers to the location of the cenotaph and cult of Achilles on the Sigean Promontory in the northwest part of the Troad. The epitaph is corrupt, though the overall meaning is conveyed: the remains of Achilles are inhumed, cremated, and entombed. The late fourth- to early fifth-century grammarian Servius mentions a statue of Achilles at Sigeum: *sane apud Sigeum Achillis statua fuisse dicitur, quae in lanna, id est in extrema auris parte elenchum more femineo habuerit* (“Indeed it is said that at Sigeum there was a statue of Achilles that had an earring in the lobe, that is, in the lowest part of the ear, after the manner of a woman,” *ad Aen.* 1.30.17).

One aspect of the deployment of Achilles as a hero in late antiquity concerns the representation of his relationship to Christian and philosophical ideals. Luxorius, a sixth-century epigrammatist from Carthage under Vandal rule, writes of a statue of Achilles at Troy and its Christian meaning as reflected in the iconography of the statue and that of Hector:

*De Statua Hectoris in Ilio Quae Videt Achillem et Sudat
Ilion in medium Pario de marmore facti
stant contra Phrygius Hector uel Graius Achilles.
Priamidae statuam sed uerus sudor inundat
et falsum fictus Hector formidat Achillem.
nescio quid mirum <est>: cesserunt Tartara caelo;
credo quod aut superis animas post funera reddunt
aut ars mira potest legem mutare barathri.*

include the fourth-century Kaiseraugst Achilles plate from Thessalonike (see Leader-Newby 2004: 125–130; Bell 1979b; Cameron 2009: 6, fig. 1) and the fragments of the fourth- to fifth-century redware (African Red Slip) Achilles plate from North Africa (see Bell 1979c; Cameron 2009: 7, fig. 2). Both plates feature similar scenes from Achilles’ youth, including him being presented to Chiron to be educated; being taught or learning to read the alphabet; learning to hunt and throw the discus; and playing the lyre. The emphasis on teaching, training, and music suggests that the intellectual elite used these scenes to draw attention to their education and cultural status.

¹⁷ On the cults of Achilles, see Shaw 2001; Rusyaeva 2003; Hupe 2006: 165–234; Burgess 2009: 111–131.

*sed si horum nihil est, certus stat marmore Hector
testaturque suam uiua formidine mortem.*

(Luxorius, *Anthologia Latina* 362 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

On a Statue of Hector at Troy that Sees Achilles and Sweats

In the middle of Troy, made of Parian marble,
stand Phrygian Hector and Greek Achilles opposite each other.
But true sweat runs over the statue of the son of Priam,
and the fictive Hector fears the false Achilles.
I do not know what is strange about this: Tartarus has yielded to heaven;
I believe that either Tartarus restores souls to the upper world after death,
or that accomplished art is able to change the law of the lower world.
But if none of these is possible, at least Hector stands in marble
and is witness to his own death with his living fear.

Here Luxorius draws attention to the lifelike quality of Hector's statue with its *uerus sudor* ("true sweat"), brought about because of his *formidine* ("fear") that he will die in his duel with Achilles. Luxorius suggests two alternative explanations for the semi-veristic appearance of the statue. Either death restores *animas* ("souls"), including those of Hector and Achilles, to the upper world, a sentiment that mirrors both the Platonic notion of reincarnation and the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus, or *ars mira* ("extraordinary art") has the capacity to be so realistic as seemingly to have instantiated these souls from the underworld.

As suggested in *Anthologia Latina* 362, Latin poets of late antiquity often adapt scenes from classical literature and imbue them with Christian significance. When Achilles' mother Thetis encourages Achilles in Statius' *Achilleid* to disguise himself in female dress among the daughters of King Lycomedes, she refers specifically to her action of placing Achilles in the waters of the Styx to render his body invulnerable to harm (*Achil.* 1.268–270; cf. 1.133–134, 1.480–481). This scene, which first appears in extant literature in Statius' *Achilleid*, is repeated in the Latin literature of late antiquity, for example, in the *Anthologia Latina*:

De Thetide

*cauta quidem genetrix, noceant ne uulnera nato,
confirmat Stygio fonte puerperium.
sed quia fas nulli est humanam uincere sortem
in membris tincti dant sibi fata locum.*

(*Anthologia Latina* 107 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

On Thetis

She is indeed a mother on one's guard who, lest wounds harm her son, tempers her newborn infant in the waters of the Styx.
But because divine law dictates that no one can defeat human destiny, the Fates leave space for themselves in the limbs of her immersed son.

De Theti<de>

*pande manum genetrix; totus tingatur Achilles,
tu faci<e>s natum mortis habere locum.*

(*Anthologia Latina* 192 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

On Thetis

Open your hand, mother; let all of Achilles be immersed;
you will cause your son to have a part vulnerable to death.

Tertullian similarly notes that Thetis suffered the loss of her son despite the assertion of an unnamed poet that the Styx renders one invulnerable to death: *plane Stygias paludes poeta tradidit mortem diluentes, sed et Thetis filium planxit* ("Clearly the poet related that the Stygian marshes wash away death, but also Thetis bewailed her son," *De anima* 50.3). Late antique Latin authors do not often specify which "body part [remained] vulnerable to death" (*mortis . . . locum*, *Anth. Lat.* 192);¹⁸ this allowed for a richer, more flexible engagement with the myth, thereby making it a vehicle for exploring universal themes of mortality, fate, and divine will in a manner that resonated with the Christianized literary and cultural milieu of the time.

Although *Anthologia Latina* 107 and 192 featuring the immersion of the infant Achilles in the Styx do not specifically suggest a Christian connection, there is obvious potential for such a link to be made. The fifth-century Latin poet Merobaudes adapts this scene in a *genethliakon* to Gaudentius, the younger son of Flavius Aëtius (died 454), who was an influential imperial figure both as a general and thrice as consul (432, 437, 446) in the western Roman empire. A court poet and a devout Christian, Merobaudes depicts the baptism of Gaudentius in terms that recall Thetis' dipping of Achilles in the Styx in a poem intended for Aëtius and his wife, possibly Pelagia:¹⁹

*quae non ut Thetis anxium pauorem
secretis Stygos abluit sub undis
et natum trepidis anhelis curis
contra fata deum metusque leti . . .
primaevos pueri rec<entis> art<us>
plenis numine fontibus rigavit,
qua puri deus arbiter lauacri
arcana laticum receptus unda
pellit crimina nec sinit fuisse
et uitam nouat obruitque poenam.*

¹⁸ But see Fulgentius (fl. late fifth to early sixth century), who mentions Thetis' dipping of Achilles in the Styx to make him a *perfectum hominem* ("perfect man") and to protect him *durum contra omnes labores* ("thoroughly against all trials"), specifically points out that *solum ei talum non tinguit* ("his ankle alone she did not immerse," *Mit.* 3.7). Servius mentions that Achilles was wounded *in talo* ("in the ankle," *ad Aen.* 9.630).

¹⁹ On the possibility of Pelagia being Aëtius' wife at this time, see Clover 1971: 30–32.

his te primitiis, puer, sacratum . . .

(Merobaudes, *Carmina* 4.19–29 [ed. Vollmer 1905])

She [Gaudentius' mother] was not like Thetis, who washed away her anxious fear about her son beneath the hidden waves of the Styx and, panting with restless concern against what is ordained by the gods and the fear of death . . . She immersed the youthful limbs of the infant in the waters flooded with divine majesty, where God, the arbiter of the pure baptismal font, is received by the sacred wave of water, expels sins, and does not permit their manifestation; he renews life and abolishes punishment. You were consecrated, boy, by these first rites . . .

Merobaudes' description of Gaudentius' baptism is pointedly meant to contrast with Thetis' dipping of the infant Achilles in the Styx in terms of its Christian significance. In his poetry Merobaudes readily blends classical motifs with Christian imagery. Thetis' immersion of Achilles was a natural analogy for Merobaudes to use for the Christian baptism by immersion, which was a common practice in the fifth century,²⁰ precisely because it exposes the differences in meaning between them. This scene illustrates how a classical image or motif can not only be perfectly adapted to a Christian context, since the baptism superficially mirrors Achilles' immersion in the Styx, but can also be adapted for a political purpose within imperial circles. Although baptism was not a formal requirement for one to be included in the imperial family or in the line of succession, after Theodosius I decreed Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman empire, the baptism of infants became strongly encouraged, and given the significant role that Christianity played in legitimizing imperial rule, the emperor himself, regardless of his private beliefs, was expected to be a Christian.

In *Romulea* 9 of the fifth-century Vandal poet Dracontius, the anonymous orator exhorts Achilles to return the corpse of Hector to his parents. While Dracontius' *Romulea* 9 is a school exercise (a *suasoria*), it takes on additional significance as the work of a Christian poet. Dracontius refers to issues involving the soul and body in his rewriting of the ransom scene in Homer's *Iliad* 24. The poem constitutes an appeal to Achilles to set aside his anger toward Hector, give up his revenge, and show compassion. The anonymous orator explains that the soul is freed from the body after death and continues its existence among the sun and the stars (18–30). The explanation has Christian overtones, as shown in its mention of the soul's imprisonment in the body (14–15, 26–27), its liberation

²⁰ Infant baptism by immersion was encouraged for all infants at the Council of Mileum II held in 416 (Canon 3). Cf. Burgess 1995; Ferguson 2009: 687–816 *passim*, 853–860.

after its release (18, 23–26, 29), and its subsequent immortality in heaven (cf. 16–27), an amalgam of motifs that mirror those in the similar description of the fourth- to fifth-century Christian poet Paulinus of Nola (*Carm.* 11.57–60).²¹ The anonymous orator argues that Achilles will reach the same place as the soul he describes if the hero agrees to return Hector's corpse:

*aduenturus eris, pietas si sancta manebit
corpore belligero, si non crudelis in hoste
post uitam morientis eris, si inmitis Achilles
nec post bella manes nec spectant funera poenas
arbitrio subiecta tuo, si parcitur umbris,
quaesitor quas torquet auus, si uera feruntur.*

(Dracontius, *Romulea* 9.31–36 [ed. Wolff 1996])

You will reach them, if a holy piety inhabits your
warrior's body, if you are not cruel towards the enemy who
has lost his life, if you do not remain the fierce Achilles
after the war, if the dead subjected to your power
do not undergo punishment, and if you spare the shades that
your ancestor, the judge, tortures, according to what they say.

As elsewhere in late antique poetry (cf., e.g., Claud. *Carm. min.* 22.13), the characteristics of Achilles alluded to here are his potential for cruelty and war-like fierceness, while he is encouraged to show the qualities of piety and compassion toward Hector's family. The aim of the orator is to suppress the *hubris* of Achilles so that he does not continue to vent his anger against his enemy. Achilles' return of Hector's corpse to Andromache and Polyxena for burial would represent an act of piety, forgiveness, and humanity (37–77 *passim*, 141–231 *passim*). In Dracontius' *suasoria*, Achilles is merely encouraged to return Hector's body to his bereaved Trojan family, whereas elsewhere the criticism of Achilles and his action is direct, if brief, as in the distich cited below (330) from *Anthologia Latina* 150.

There is a distinctly Christian resonance to *Romulea* 9.31–36 and the *suasoria* as a whole, especially in respect to the aforementioned qualities that are important for Achilles to show toward his enemy. The references to Achilles' dismemberment of Hector's corpse (44, 78–79, 85–91, 111–112, 148–153, 163–188), which does not actually occur in the Homeric version (cf. *Il.* 24.228–229), are echoed in the mutilation and laceration of the bodies of the Christian faithful in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* (1.43–93; 3.86–160; 5.99–554 *passim*; 9.37–92; 10.6–10, 448–455, 556–561, 696–705, 756–767, 796–799, 836–845, 896–910, 1108–9; 14.88–90), including in the amphitheater (6.61–120).²² In addition, the orator's encouragement of Achilles to hand over

²¹ Cf. Stoechr-Monjou 2015: 169.

²² Cf. Scaffai 1995: 317–321; Stoechr-Monjou 2015: 170.

Hector's corpse for burial (37–44, 212–231) and the general stress on inhumation in *Romulea* 9 bring to mind the importance of interment in the Christian tradition.²³

Paideia

A number of late antique Latin poems, including those by Christian poets, refer to the role of *paideia* in the identification of values important to the self-definition of the elite Roman class and to the concept of *Romanitas*.²⁴ As late antique texts concerning Achilles were used as moral and ethical *exempla* by teachers and private tutors, the question naturally arises whether he was a suitable role model for students who were aspiring to rise to the upper echelons of society. Indeed, from the ambivalent comments of late antique Latin poets it is apparent that the subject of Achilles had to be approached carefully if he were to serve as an exemplary model for youth. Adolescents in the schools of this period examined the transformation of Achilles from a baby through his instruction by Chiron to a fully fledged warrior hero at the end of the *Iliad*.²⁵ The *Iliad* mentions Achilles' education under Phoenix (9.438–445), who mentored Achilles μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμειναι πρηκῆρρά τε ἔργων ("to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds," *Il.* 9.442–443), and Chiron (11.831–832). Pindar mentions Chiron's training of Achilles in the methods of hunting and war (*Nem.* 3.43–53, 57–63) as well as his moral instruction (*Pyth.* 6.21–27). The major extant source for the education of Achilles, however, is Statius' *Achilleid*. In this unfinished epic the poet recounts Achilles' training and education under Chiron (*Achil.* 2.94–163), the details of which are alluded to in the poetry of late antiquity.

Various Latin prose texts in late antiquity not only summarized Homer's *Iliad* but also added details from Achilles' childhood and adolescence; along with the *Iliad* they would have formed part of the curriculum of students during this period, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries.²⁶ These texts incorporated and adapted in various ways the content and motifs of the Achilles theme from earlier works in order to create new meaning and cultural authority in the texts of the present. From these extant texts it is apparent that the budding Roman political elite studied the figure of Achilles as an exemplary model, both positive and negative, for the proper use of power, including the advantages to be derived from its beneficent exercise and the destruction that could result from its abuse. Ultimately the Achilles myth served

²³ Rebillard 2009; cf. Stoehr-Monjou 2015: 155, esp. 170–171.

²⁴ Cameron (2009: 11–19), however, maintains that the childhood education of Achilles should be more aptly referred to as *anatrophe* ("nurture") instead of *paideia*.

²⁵ Cf. above, 310, n. 6.

²⁶ Cf. above, 310, n. 6. Major prose texts are the *Periochae Homeri Iliadis et Odysiae* (fourth century) dubiously ascribed to Asconius; Dictys' *Ephemeris belli Troiani* (fourth century); and Dares' *De excidio Troiae historia* (fifth century).

a political function since it was an example of the means by which the late Roman governing class and intellectual elite made use of the mythological tradition not only to maintain their social status but also to emphasize the importance of *paideia* as part of the process of reinforcing their cultural and class identity.²⁷

The important role of *paideia* in late antiquity is evident especially in the various myths and figures from classical literature and history that were employed as school exercises by classroom teachers and tutors, many of whom were Greek. Dracontius' *Romulea* 9, whose Christian overtones are discussed above (317–319), is a scholastic *suasoria* of 231 verses written in the dactylic hexameter. The arguments of the orator that Achilles should return Hector's body to Priam are based partly upon an appeal to his stature as a heroic warrior (*Romul.* 9.1–9). But there is also a philosophical reason adduced in arguing that it is in Achilles' interest to allow Hector's body to be burned (9–15), as well as a practical consideration involving the condition of the corpse, which, if left to rot, could lead to an epidemic (85–91).

The anonymous orator explains the immortality of the soul by employing classical motifs, including not only the soul being imprisoned in its body but also the soul laughing at and expressing contempt for the body as it flies away (*Romul.* 9.16–30, esp. 23–30); the latter two notions evoke Lucanian (cf. *Phars.* 9.4) and Statian reminiscences (cf. *Theb.* 8.738–739), respectively.²⁸ The orator mentions specifically the training that Achilles received from the centaur Chiron:

*certe medicabilis ille
te Chiron docuit pestes sanare iacentum,
cum chordas quateret plectro, cum bella manerent,
et citharam post lora daret, cum mentis onustae
post Centaurorum raptas de flumine praedas
ingentes animos puerili in corde leuaret;
non docuit quia maestus odor, quia putre cadauer
aera tellurem uentos animasque grauabit?*

(Dracontius, *Romulea* 9.105–112 [ed. Wolff 1996])

No doubt Chiron taught you to
remedy the pestilence of carrion when he plucked the
strings with his plectrum, when wars awaited you, when he gave you
a cithara after the reins, and after you had taken
the spoils of the Centaurs from the river, sustained, with a mind
loaded with knowledge, the immense courage of your childish heart.
Did he not teach you that a fatal smell, that the rotting corpse,
fouls the air, the earth, the winds, and breeze?

²⁷ On the idea of the governing elite class being shaped through classical *paideia*, see Libanius, *Epistulae* 994.2 (rev. Foerster 1922 [1963]).

²⁸ Cf. Stoechr-Monjou 2015: 160–161.

Here the references to the various types of knowledge that Chiron imparted to Achilles include how to remove the pestilence of birds of prey, playing the cithara, riding a horse, and how the smell of a decaying corpse pollutes the environment. The mention of the smell of this *putre cadauer* ("rotting corpse") brings to mind poetic descriptions of a plague (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 1.52; Lucr. *DRN* 6.1154–55; Virg. *G.* 3.556–558; Ov. *Met.* 7.523–610; Luc. *Phars.* 6.88–103).²⁹ The central role of Achilles in this *suasoria* demonstrates his prominence in the schools not only in actual declamatory exercises but also as an exemplary figure in relation to his education and training during childhood and adolescence. This emphasis upon teaching, training, and music is a reflection not only of the value that the intellectual elite placed upon *paideia* but also its significance in terms of cultural capital in late antiquity.

Another late antique school exercise in which Achilles features is *Anthologia Latina* 189 (ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982), commonly known as Achilles' *ethopoeia* from the Codex Salmasianus (fifth to sixth century),³⁰ which deals with the episode of Achilles on Scyros. This poem from Vandal Africa with the title of *Verba Achillis in parthenone, dum tubam Diomedis audisset* ("The words of Achilles in the virgins' chamber when he heard the trumpet of Diomedes") appears as a scholastic *ethopoeia* of eighty-nine hexametric verses.³¹ The plot of this declamation consists of Achilles expressing a resolve to leave his transvestite stage behind him and to pursue his destiny as a warrior in response to Diomedes' trumpet call to arms.

The anonymous poet's treatment of his subject, which suggests a familiarity with both Dracontius' *Romulea* and Statius' *Achilleid*, follows the chronological arrangement expected of an *ethopoeia*.³² The first section of the poem features a prologue contextualizing the story of Achilles on Scyros (1–9). This is followed by a passage in which Achilles mentions his origins and upbringing with his *magister* Chiron (13–16). Achilles alternates between the first person and self-apostrophe in arguing for a life of martial glory over his ignominious transvestism and female activities, with an emphasis upon martial *uirtus* (10–43, esp. 30–36):

*praesumit certam uirtus sibi conscia palmam
ac dubios gaudet perferre interrita casus,
nil metuat qui magna cupit. constantia mentis
fata domat, nec iam potis est Fortuna nocere
seculo mortis, cui non sunt bella timori.
fortibus una uiris parilisque per omnia sors est,*

²⁹I thank one of *Phoenix's* in-house readers for some of these *comparanda*.

³⁰There are a number of references to Achilles by name in the Codex Salmasianus: 30.1, 44.1, 50.1, 174.5, 189.58, 192.1, 288.5, 367.2, 367.4 (ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982). On the background, context, and dating of the Codex Salmasianus, see Heusch 1997: 13–84 *passim*; cf. Gasti 2007; Gasti 2008.

³¹This *ethopoeia* is divided into four sections: 1–9, 10–43, 44–77, 78–89.

³²See Heusch 1997: 33, 40–43.

aut palmae aut leti pugnando adquirere laudem.
 (Anthologia Latina 189.30–36 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

Self-confident, manly courage anticipates victory as certain
 and fearlessly rejoices in enduring dangers to the end.
 He who desires great things need fear nothing. A steadfast heart
 conquers fate; and Fortune can no longer harm a man
 free from anxiety about death and who is not afraid of wars.
 Brave men have one and the same lot in all things:
 they acquire the glory either of victory or of death by battle.

This sentiment of Achilles regarding *uirtus* (“courage”) and martial glory is tinged with Stoic sentiment and edification.³³

A mini-*ethopoeia* follows in the form of a fictional interlocutor who intervenes to challenge the resolve of Achilles by mentioning the ethical consequences of his decision in terms of the pain his mother Thetis, wife Deidamia, and son Neoptolemus will experience, as well as the predestined nature of his death (44–58). In response, Achilles emphasizes that the domestic and familial aspects of his life under the tutelage of Chiron and on Skyros are outweighed not only by his sense of *pudor* (“shame”) over avoiding the impending war but also by the importance of the public honor and military *uirtus* that will ultimately earn him immortality (59–77, esp. 74–77):

mibi nam lux amplior ulla est
quae uirtute fluit, quae nescit claustra sepulchri.
namque homini semper meritorum lege perenni,
quam breuiat fatum, propagat gloria uitam.
 (Anthologia Latina 189.74–77)

For the light means more to me that
 flows from valor, which knows not the prison of the grave.
 For according to the eternal law of merit, fame always
 prolongs the life of man, which destiny shortens.

Yet another Stoic sentiment of Achilles appears here, with emphasis placed upon the attainment of fame through *uirtus*.³⁴

The final part of the *ethopoeia* shows Achilles’ determination to leave Neoptolemus and Deidamia to fight in the Trojan war, which demonstrates his obedience to martial *uirtus* rather than to his mother and to Venusian *uoluptas* (“pleasure,” 78–89, esp. 82–84, 87):

me pudor hortatur rapere in certamina gressus.
ferre potes<t> quaecumque labans successibus aetas
exigi<t>.

³³ On the Stoic dimensions of this passage, see Heusch 1997: 42, 64, 68–69, 133–139 *passim*.

³⁴ See Heusch 1997: 64–69 *passim*, 134, 179–187 *passim* on the Stoic undercurrent of these verses.

...

*Virtuti adsurgat, fuerat quaecumque, Voluptas.*³⁵

(*Anthologia Latina* 189.82–84, 87 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

Honor, able to endure whatever life demands as it moves
along in the continuum of time, drives me to hasten my steps
into the fray.

...

Let Pleasure rise in honor to Courage, whatever it may have been.

The values alluded to by Achilles in these passages are remarkably consistent with Stoic ideas. Achilles' emphasis in these passages is upon Stoic qualities discussed, for example, in Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, such as courage, equanimity, steadfastness, glory, honor, and forbearance.³⁶ These qualities seem identical with some of the ideas of Christian doctrine and eschatology in late antiquity mentioned elsewhere in this section (312–325).

Imperial Politics

For late antique prose writers and poets, the positive qualities of Achilles were inherent in the concept of *mos maiorum*, which was viewed by the Roman elite as essential to the maintenance of their social status and political position. Achilles is portrayed as possessing qualities suitable for a leader, and comparisons of him with political and military figures are constituent features of *exempla* in both prose and poetry. In *Panegyrici Latini* 6 (delivered in 309–310), the anonymous orator likens Constantine to Alexander, the one who was *Magnum* ("Great King"), and to *Thessalum uirum* ("the Thessalian hero"), who is, of course, Achilles (6.17.1–2). Constantine's identification with Achilles (*Pan. Lat.* 6.17.1–2) obviously serves as a positive *exemplum* of a Roman emperor. The essential qualities mentioned are *fortitudo* ("bravery"), *uirtus* ("courage"), *maiestas* ("majesty"), and *pulchritudo* ("physical attractiveness"). Additionally, Achilles is encouraged to exercise restraint and to show compassion to Hector's family in late antique Latin poetry (e.g., Dracont. *Romul.* 9.31–77 *passim*, 141–231 *passim*) and prose (e.g., Dictys, *Eph.* 13). According to Catherine Ware (2014: 88), this quality of *clementia* ("clemency") is one of the main canonical virtues of the Roman encomiastic tradition. These positive qualities mentioned in association with Achilles combine to form a *speculum principis*, a model for an emperor's conduct and actions.

³⁵ I have slightly emended the text of Shackleton Bailey 1982 from *uirtuti* and *uoluptas* to *Virtuti* and *Voluptas*, respectively.

³⁶ *uirtus/fortitudo* ("courage"/"bravery," *Anth. Lat.* 189.30–32, 34–35, 77, 87 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 66–67), *securitas* ("equanimity," *Anth. Lat.* 189.32, 34 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 18.6–8), *constantia* ("steadfastness," *Anth. Lat.* 189.32 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 35), *laus/gloria* ("glory," *Anth. Lat.* 189.36, 77 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 43.1–5, 52.12, 59.11), *pudor* ("honor," *Anth. Lat.* 189.82 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 11.1, 25.2), and *patientia* ("forbearance," *Anth. Lat.* 189.83–84 Sh. B.; cf., e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 64.4–5; 67.5–6, 10).

Both pagan and Christian poets in late antiquity compared their emperors and other imperial figures to Achilles. Claudian, Ausonius, and Sidonius Apollinaris illustrate how members of the Roman upper class, regardless of their pagan or Christian orientation, could display the classical knowledge acquired as a result of their *paideia*.³⁷ In Claudian's panegyric on the third consulship of the twelve-year-old emperor Honorius commencing in 396, the poet compares Theodosius I's training of his young son Honorius with Achilles' swift mastery of the spear and lyre under the martial tutoring of Chiron:

*hos tibi uirtutum stimulos, haec semina laudum,
haec exempla dabat. non ocius hausit Achilles
semiferi praecepta senis, seu cuspidis artes
siue lyrae cantus medicas seu disceret herbas.*

(Claudian, *De tertio consulatu Honorii Augusti* 59–62 [ed. Hall 1985])

In this he spurred your courage, sowed the seeds of glory; these were the examples he gave. Not more quickly did Achilles drink in the precepts of the aged Centaur when he learned the skills of spear-throwing, playing the lyre, or using medicinal herbs.

It is Honorius' martial training, which is based upon the examples of Chiron's training of Achilles (cf. Stat. *Achil.* 107–108, 129–152), that receives the most emphasis in Claudian's panegyric. Ausonius merely implies a comparison of the emperor Gratian to Achilles (*Lectori salutem* 1.29–34), as mentioned below (326–327), whereas Sidonius, in his panegyric on Anthemius, actually addresses the emperor as Achilles:

*conde Pelethronios, alacer puer et uenator,
Aeacida, titulos, quamquam subiecta magistri
terga premens et ob hoc securus lustra pererrans
tu potius regereris equo.*

(Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* 2.149–152 [ed. Anderson 1936])

Now lay up your Thessalian honors, lively boy and hunter, offspring of Aeacus [Achilles], though as you held fast to your master's compliant back and so roamed in safety the haunts of beasts, it was rather you who were guided by the steed.

Here Sidonius represents Anthemius as a second Achilles directly by using the hero's patronymic, though he also alludes to his youth and hunting activities as he was borne by the centaur Chiron in the wild (cf. 2.138–148).

³⁷ Both Augustine (*De civ. D.* 5.26) and Orosius (*Historiae adversus paganos* 4.2) declare Claudian to be a pagan; cf. Christiansen and Christiansen 2009; *contra* Cameron 1970: 189–227. Ausonius' correspondence with his former student Paulinus of Nola suggests his adherence to Christianity, for instance, when Ausonius expresses the need to return to Bordeaux for the Easter vigil (Auson. *Ep.* 27.3 [ed. Green 1991]) and when Paulinus infers Ausonius' Christianity (cf., e.g., Paulin. *Carm.* 11.17–18, 55–62 [ed. Hartel 1894]); cf. Green 1991: xxviii; Nicholson 2014: 237; *contra* Evelyn-White 1919: xiv. Sidonius was reared as a Christian and served as the Bishop of Clermont later in life (480).

Even though Achilles is not always mentioned by name specifically or patronymically in a Latin poetic text of late antiquity, he still looms in the background of some poems through periphrastic or intertextual references that evoke the memory of his life and deeds. When Sidonius addresses Avitus in his panegyric (456 C.E.), he compares the emperor to Achilles indirectly through references that allude to the mythological hero's upbringing and training, namely Avitus' learning as an infant to endure snow and ice (*Carm.* 7.171–173); his boyhood slaying of a wolf with a stone (177–182); his use of hounds to track wild beasts in their den and to slay boars with his spear (187–194); and his physical and martial abilities, such as his swiftness, javelin-throwing, swimming, use of the shield, marching, and wielding of the scimitar (235–237).³⁸ Ennodius' declamation celebrating Epiphanius' thirtieth year as bishop of Pavia alludes to Achilles in Statian terms that recall the hero's infancy (*hunc . . . de primis et adhuc reptantibus annis*, "this child . . . young and in his crawling years," *Dictio quae habita est in natali sancti ac beatissimi Papae Epifani in annum tricensimum sacerdotii* 43, *Carm.* 1.9.110 [ed. Vogel 1885]; cf. Stat. *Achil.* 2.96: *in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis*). In his epithalamium for the emperor Maximus, Ennodius again refers indirectly to Achilles through a Statian lens when he cites the consolatory words the hero addressed to Deidamia after raping her (*ille ego! quid trepidas! semper contemptus adhaesi / uisceribus, fugitive, tuis*, "I am he! Why are you trembling? Always despised by you, fugitive, I stuck in your heart," *Epithalamium dictum Maximo V. S.* 388, *Carm.* 1.4.109–110 [ed. Vogel 1885]; cf. Stat. *Achil.* 1.650: *ille ego (quid trepidas?)*).³⁹

ACHILLES AS A NEGATIVE *EXEMPLUM* OR AN INFERIOR FOIL

The themes of Christianity, *paideia*, and imperial politics also loom large in the representation of Achilles as a negative *exemplum*; furthermore, he is identified occasionally as being an inferior foil to a political or military figure in some aspect of skill or character. Some Christian poets in late antiquity represented the pagan Achilles as the antithesis of Christian patience and self-sacrifice. Despite the many positive references to Achilles noted above, it seems that from the perspective of these poets he was considered to be a figure unworthy of making a complete transformation from a pagan hero to a Christian role model. The fourth-century Greek writer and theologian John Chrysostom cites Achilles as a bad example from pagan myth for children given his actions, *inter alia*, of relenting, presumably by returning to battle, and dying on behalf of his concubine Briseis (*Homily* 21). A portrayal of Achilles as an *exemplum* of anti-Christian behavior occurs around the turn of the third century in the *De pallio* (4.2.1–5) of Tertullian, who criticizes Achilles for continuing to act like a girl when he was presumably no longer under Thetis' influence

³⁸ On the echoes of Statius' *Achilleid* in these lines, see Gineste 2006: 138–140.

³⁹ On Ennodius' use of Statian references to Achilles without ever explicitly mentioning him, see Bernstein 2019: 78–83.

as a grown man and after he had raped Deidamia (4.24.2.1–5).⁴⁰ Tertullian attributes to Achilles a lack of character and of the moral qualities that defined the *nobilitas* to which the Roman upper classes of late antiquity aspired and the *urbanitas* which they sought to present as a mark of their social distinction.

The anonymous orator's similar criticism of Paris in Dracontius' *Romulea* 9, in which he appeals to Achilles to give up his revenge, is made in the context of the indirect allusion to Paris' fatal wounding of Achilles.⁴¹ This denunciation of Paris is rich with irony because of its obvious application to Achilles:

*qui uindicet Hectora, non est.
anne Parin fortuna iubet? qui crine madenti
inter lanigeras gaudet latuisse puellas
nec mater ueneranda iubet, quod laudis habetur;
hoc agit et pugnam thalamis exercet adulter,
pectore femineo Veneris nam bella lacessit,
ut Martis declinet opus uel fulmina campi
effugiat . . .*

(Dracontius, *Romulea* 9.55–62 [ed. Wolff 1996])

There is nobody who can avenge Hector.
Or does Fortune assign this role to Paris? With wet hair, he
rejoices to have hid among the wool-spinning girls; nor does
his venerable mother bid him to perform a deed worthy
of praise. He acts thus and as an adulterer engages
in the combat of the bedroom. For with a womanly heart
he undertakes Venus' wars to shun the work of Mars and to
flee the battlefield's thunderbolts . . .

The events recounted here could have been written about Achilles and, in fact, apply equally to him. All the actions of Paris are those that Achilles himself engages in while on Scyros, where he dresses in women's clothing and accessories and then masquerades as a woman among the daughters of King Lycomedes of Scyros before Odysseus discovers him (cf. Stat. *Achil.* 1.198–396, 570–884). The parallels between the actions of the two figures reflect poorly upon Achilles and ultimately tarnish his image as a heroic figure in *Romulea* 9.

In late antique Latin poetry, the *exempla* related to *paideia*, as discussed in the previous section, involve attributes viewed as essential to successful governance by the emperor and the elite Roman class of late antiquity. Achilles was employed as a benchmark mythological hero against whom to assess the deeds and virtues of an elite public figure, not just the emperor. The association between *paideia* and the imperial court and other elite Romans is suggested when Ausonius likens

⁴⁰This passage alludes to the cross-dressing scenes that are most prominent in Statius' *Achilleid* 1.198–396, 570–884; see Heslin 2005: 270–274; Gerlo 1940: *passim*, esp. 109.

⁴¹On Paris' slaying of Achilles, cf. Burgess 1995; Burgess 2009 *passim*.

his tutelage of the future emperor Gratian to Chiron's tutelage of Achilles and Atlas' instruction of Hercules:

*cedo tamen fuerint fama potiore magistri,
dum nulli fuerit discipulus melior.
Alcides Atlantis et Aeacides Chironis,
paene Ioue iste satus, filius ille Iouis,
Thessaliam Thebasque suos habuere penates:
at meus hic toto regnat in orbe suo.*

(Ausonius, *Ausonius lectori salutem* 29–34 [ed. Prete 1978])

Nevertheless I grant there have been tutors of greater fame,
while there has been to no one a better student. Alcaeus'
offspring [Hercules] was taught by Atlas, and the son of Aeacus [Achilles] by
Chiron. The first was Jupiter's own son, and the other
almost sprung from Jupiter; they lived in Thebes and Thessaly.
But my student reigns supreme over the whole world—his own.

The suggestion is that Gratian is to be likened to Achilles and Hercules and even transcends them as a student. In the Latin poetry of late antiquity, important political and military figures are identified not merely as being equals of Achilles but also as superior to the Greek hero, as Gratian is here in respect to his ability as a student and supremacy as a ruler.⁴² There was a tradition in Roman literature and rhetoric of endeavoring to elevate the social or political position of a *laudandus* through depreciation of the exemplary status of a mythological hero such as Achilles.⁴³ In late antiquity this practice is exemplified by the sixth-century bishop Venantius Fortunatus in a poem in which he celebrates the bishop Felix for changing the course of a river to increase the irrigation supply for the local inhabitants: *cuncti Felicem legent modo, nullus Achillem* ("All would read only about Felix; no one would read about Achilles," *De domino Felice Namnetico, cum fluvium alibi detorqueret* 3.10.5).⁴⁴

A notable comparison occurs in *Iohannis* (or *De bellis Libycis*) when the sixth-century epic poet Corippus celebrates the military exploits of the Byzantine general John Troglita against the Moors in Africa (533–538). Corippus compares the martial skill and strength of the Moorish chieftain Cusina, a supporter of the Roman cause, with those of both Adonis and Achilles:

⁴² Such comparisons between Achilles and prominent figures also occur in late antique prose, for example, when Procopius relates that the Vandal prince Hoamer was referred to as the Achilles of the Vandals (*De bello Vandalico* 1.9.2) and when the *presbyter* Parthenius compares the *comes* Sigisteus to Achilles (*Rescriptum ad Sigisteum* [ed. Hamman 1958: col. 448]).

⁴³ See Hadjittofi (2021: 293), who cites the example of the second-century rhetorician Fronto in a letter of 165 to Lucius Verus: *tantas res a te gestas, quantas Achilles gessisse cuperet et Homerus scripsisse* ("these great deeds performed by you such as Achilles would have desired to achieve and Homer to have written," *Ad Lucium Verum imp.* 1 [ed. Haines 1920]).

⁴⁴ Cf. Pégolo 2018: 17–18; Hadjittofi 2021: 294.

*hos sequitur fidus, densa stipante caterua,
Cusina Massylis deducens agmina signis.
ille animo Romanus erat, nec sanguine longe,
moribus ornatus placidis, grauitate Latina.
non illum aequiperans iaculis aut uiribus esset
uel Veneri dilectus Adon, uel fortis Achilles.*

(Corippus, *Iohannis* 4.509–514 [ed. Diggle and Goodyear 1970])

Loyal Cusina followed them with a dense and crowded band,
leading out his troops under Massylian standards.
He was a Roman in spirit and not far from one in blood,
blessed with a calm demeanor and Latin dignity.
Neither Adonis, beloved of Venus, nor brave Achilles,
could equal him in using the spear or in physical strength.

The attribution to Achilles of inferior strength or a lesser skill in the use of the spear in comparison with Cusina (513–514) is the direct opposite of what is suggested earlier by Ausonius:

*si tendi facilis cuiquam fuit arcus Ulixei
aut praeter dominum uibrabilis ornus Achilli,
nos quoque tam longo Rhamnusia foedere soluet.*

(Ausonius, *Ausonius Paulino* 5–7 [ed. Prete 1978])

If Ulysses' bow was easy to be strung by someone or
if Achilles' spear could be brandished except by its lord, then
the Rhamnusian queen could free us from so long a compact.

Here Ausonius alludes implicitly to the deadliness of Achilles' spear and the strength required by its bearer to wield it.

Elsewhere in *Iohannis* Corippus refers to Achilles as both *saeuus* ("cruel," *praef.* 7, 1.178) and *fortis* ("brave," *praef.* 11; 1.190; 4.514, 802). While Achilles is portrayed as being *saeuus* when he drags the body of Hector behind his chariot (1.178–179), he is called *fortis* when the Trojan army flees before him (4.802). These references reflect the ambiguity of Achilles' representation in late antique Latin poetry. Corippus describes Achilles as being inferior in strength and martial ability to Cusina; as well, Achilles' irascible character and conduct are generally viewed as being inappropriate for an emperor or military commander. Even so, Achilles' reputation as a fierce warrior seems to have encapsulated, if somewhat paradoxically, the type of strong character that appealed to the elite in their struggle to maintain the Roman ascendancy in the face of their struggles against their barbarian neighbors.

Despite the importance of compassion and restraint mentioned in the Latin texts of late antiquity, as discussed above (323), the anonymous orator's descriptions of Constantine's *seueritas* ("harshness") in *Panegyrici Latini* 6 (310) are inherently didactic and protreptic in the emphasis they place upon the necessity of demonstrating this quality against one's enemies instead of *clemen-*

tia (“clemency,” “mercy,” “compassion”) when circumstances demand it (e.g., *Pan. Lat.* 6.10.1–6.13.5).⁴⁵ A similar passage occurs in Claudian’s poem on the consulship of Stilicho (400) describing the commander’s campaigns against the Visigoths and the Bastarnae:

*quis enim Visos in plaustra feroces
reppulit aut saeua Promoti caede tumentes
Bastarnas una potuit delere ruina?
Pallantis iugulum Turno moriente piauit
Aeneas, tractus que rotis ultricibus Hector
irato uindicta fuit uel quaestus Achilli:
tu neque uesano raptas uenalia curru
funera nec uanam corpus meditaris in unum
saeuitiam: turmas equitum peditum que cateruas
hostiles que globos tumulo prosternis amici:
inferiis gens tota datur. nec Mulciber auctor
mendacis clipei fabricata que uatibus arma
conatus iuuere tuos: tot barbara solus
milia iam pridem miseram uastantia Thracen
finibus exiguae uallis conclusa tenebas.*

(Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis* 1.94–108 [ed. Hall 1985])

Who else indeed could have repelled the fierce Visigoths to their wagons or destroyed in one cruel massacre the Bastarnae swollen with pride over the murder of Promotus. Aeneas avenged the slaughter of Pallas through the death of Turnus. Hector, dragged behind the chariot, was either revenge or profit to the angry Achilles. You [Stilicho] do not drag away in a mad chariot bodies for ransom nor plan senseless cruelty against a single corpse: you strew before the tomb of your friend entire squadrons of cavalry, companies of foot-soldiers, and enemy throngs. A whole nation is dispatched to the nether regions. Neither Vulcan, forger of the deceptive shield nor the forged armor sung by poets helped your efforts: alone you hemmed in within the boundaries of a little valley so many thousands of barbarian hordes that had long laid waste to wretched Thrace.

Echoing the anonymous orator’s implicit approval of Constantine’s *seueritas*, Claudian suggests that praise is due to Stilicho for his slaughter of the army of barbarian hordes as vengeance for the slaying of Promotus, whom Stilicho had succeeded (399). Just as Corippus depicts Cusina in *Iohannis* as being superior to Achilles in strength and the use of the spear (4.513–514; see above, 327–328), so here Claudian portrays Stilicho as being superior to Achilles (and Aeneas) in not merely avenging the wrong of a single opponent by slaying

⁴⁵ Cf. Ware 2014; Dominik 2022: 151–152.

him, but rather in annihilating an entire nation and its fighting forces without the assistance of even a single god such as Vulcan, who forged shields and armor for Achilles (and Aeneas). Claudian disparages Achilles as mad through the use of the transferred epithet *uesano . . . curru* ("mad chariot," *Stil. Cons.* 1.100), as mercenary (*uenalia . . . funera*, "corpses for ransom," 100–101), and as savage (*uanam . . . saeuitiam*, "meaningless cruelty," 101–102), whereas Stilicho's repelling of the Visigoths (94–95) and even worse slaughter of the Bastarnae (cf. *saeva . . . caede*, "cruel massacre," 95) are vaunted and celebrated as evidence of his military prowess.⁴⁶ The reference to Achilles' venality, which is an element in the pro-Trojan, pro-Hector tradition of Roman literature (cf., e.g., Virg. *Aen.* 1.484), is reminiscent of *Anthologia Latina* 150. This distich criticizes Achilles as being cruel for his mutilation and consequent devaluation of Hector's corpse:

In Achillem

*inprobe distractor, pretium si poscere nosset,
non traheres quod pondus erat†.*

(*Anthologia Latina* 150 [ed. Shackleton Bailey 1982])

Against Achilles

Wicked dismemberer [Achilles], if you knew how to demand its real value, you would not drag around what was worth its weight in gold.

Here Achilles is condemned specifically for his violent treatment and desecration of Hector's body. This passage also seems to question—possibly in a sardonically humorous vein—Achilles' intellect for his wilful mistreatment of Hector's corpse and its resultant depreciation.

The turn of the fifth century was witness to the increasing Christianization of the imperial court and its meddling in religious affairs under the emperor Honorius, successor of Theodosius I in the western part of the empire. During this period Claudian walked a tightrope between the two traditions of paganism and Christianity, as reflected in his earlier career as a pagan poet and his later one as a propagandist for Honorius.⁴⁷ As an ally of Theodosius I, who was a committed Christian and the father-in-law of Honorius, Stilicho appears at least nominally to have been an adherent.⁴⁸ By showing Stilicho to be superior in martial terms to Achilles and by stressing the latter's vices, Claudian potentially supplants a classical hero and his exploits with a contemporary Christian *laudandus* and paradoxical *exemplum*. As can be seen in this comparison between

⁴⁶ On Achilles as a negative foil for Stilicho, see Hadjittofi 2021: 304–305, esp. 305.

⁴⁷ On these two phases of Claudian's career, see Christiansen and Christiansen 2009. Cameron (1970: *passim*) associates Claudian closely with the court of the Christian emperor Honorius.

⁴⁸ Cf. Burns 1994: 220. Prudentius considers Stilicho to be a Christian (*Libri contra Symmachum* 2.711), while Zosimus cites his anti-pagan act of stripping the gold from the doors of the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter (*Historia nova* 5.38.5); Orosius, however, views Stilicho as a pagan (*Oros., Historiae adversus paganos* 7.38).

Stilicho and Achilles, the cultural and martial aspects are not incompatible when it comes to considering the import and relevance of this poetic representation of Achilles.

CONCLUSION

In late antiquity there are numerous positive references to Achilles and, notwithstanding the negative aspects that are evident in regard to his depiction, he is still viewed as an exemplary poetic subject. In fact, this analysis of Achilles' role in the Latin literature of this period illustrates that he is viewed as a positive role model more often than as a negative one or as an inferior foil. Both the positive and unfavorable aspects of Achilles' characterization are linked to the aspirations of the Roman elite and the values emphasized by both pagan and Christian Latin poets. The discussion above has focused upon passages that exemplify separately his positive and negative qualities, but late antique Latin poets acknowledged Achilles' favorable attributes even when they were critical of him (as did the Stoics before them⁴⁹) for his violent passions and his difficulty in controlling his emotions. A single passage that exemplifies the ambivalence of his poetic representation occurs in the *Deprecatio ad Hadrianum* when Claudian suggests that Achilles possesses an oxymoronic duality in his healing of Telephus, whom he had wounded with a spear:

*sanus Achilleis remeavit Telephus herbis,
cuius pertulerat uires, et sensit in uno
letalem placidamque manum; medicina per hostem
contigit, et pepulit quos fecerat ipse dolores.*

(Claudian, *Carmina minora* 22.46–49 [ed. Hall 1985])

Telephus came back cured by the herbs of Achilles, who had restored his strength, and sensed both the deadly and healing hand in one man [Achilles]. The enemy's healing touched and drove out those pains he himself had meted out.

Here Achilles' dual nature is exemplified in his ability both to destroy and to heal, mirroring the duality of his tutor Chiron, who is a composite figure emblematic both of civilized culture and of primitive bestiality. When Achilles is portrayed positively by Latin poets of late antiquity as an *exemplum* of the type of behavior that promotes the values of the elite classes, the representation usually elides or plays down aspects of his character that are depicted negatively by poets for whom he is an *exemplum* of the type of behavior that should be avoided. Achilles is a complex hero who is shown not only engaging in cultural and curative activities but also performing cruel and vengeful deeds, underscoring the multifaceted nature of heroism in late antiquity. He thus serves as a versatile

⁴⁹ Cf., for example, the ambivalent remarks of Chrysippus mediated through Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.6–7: Cullyer 2008.

mythical figure who embodies the virtues and vices that shape the religious, educational, and political discourse of the late antique period.

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