**The cult and the image of Achilles in Roman times**

The purpose of this dissertation is a comprehensive investigation of the figure of Achilles both as an object of worship and as a literary representation during the imperial period. For this purpose, epigraphic, numismatic and literary sources will be examined.

Achilles is the preeminent warrior of all the times and, clearly, it was not possible for the Romans to omit the reference to him. However, his presentation is quite different from the well-known epic tradition during the imperial period; thus, facts of his life are projected, which are not widely known, such as his upbringing by Chiron, his love affair with Briseis and Deidamia, as well as elements of his personality and appearance. The selection of these least-known episodes highlights different aspects of his character and lays emphasis more on his emotional rather than his war side. On the other hand, in another group of sources, Achilles’ heroic identity maintains unchanged, as it is provided by the epic tradition.

Initially, it will be investigated whether it is a cult of a hero or a god, i.e. whether the hero is worshiped in Greece (Thessaly, Epirus and the rest of Greece) or broadly (Black Sea region, mainly). For this issue will be examined inscriptions from the aforementioned areas, especially for the roman times (1st century BC-2nd century AD) but also inscriptions of the archaic times. Specifically, after a brief research in the inscriptions’ corpus, 32 inscriptions have been identified from the Roman period, which belong to the type of votive offerings and are offered in honor of Achilles, who in most cases is addressed as "Pontarch" (special mention in his relationship with the sea-son of a Nereid-in *Iliad* often resorts to it- protector of sailors) and "prince of Lefki island" (from the Black Sea). The rest of the inscriptions are pre-Christian, starting from the 6th / 5th century BC, mainly from Olbia.

In addition to the inscriptions, information about the hero’s cult is provided by literary sources of the Roman period, most importantly from Philostratus’ *Heroicus*. This is a work of the middle of the 3rd c. AD, in which we are informed both about the cult of the hero in Sigium and his external appearance and other facts and events of the Trojan War. His worship is also mentioned, to a lesser extent, by Arrian, Pausanias, Dio of Prusa, Pliny, Strabo, Herodotus, Solinus, Quintus Smyrnaeus, who refer to the existence of the worship or that of a temple. Nevertheless, the most important source due to the area must be Philostratus.

The Roman image of Peleides is supplemented by numismatic findings that come mainly from Greece during the period of Hadrian and, obviously, are part of the general framework of the Renaissance effort that characterized this emperor. The coins’ depictions include the following: the head of the hero, the hero in a chariot or standing, his shield, his horses and the depictions are accompanied by his name’s initials (AX).

Literary sources of Roman times, also, present facts of the life of Achilles, which are not so widely known.

The first special case is that of Quintus Smyrnaeus, who describes in detail the death and burial of the Thessalian hero, in his work *Posthomerica*. His work is full of war scenes, in which either Achilles himself stars, following the "rage" that overwhelms him due to the death of his close friend, Antilochus (the corresponding Patroclus of the *Iliad*), or the Achaeans, with Ajax and Odysseus, who try to protect his dead body (similar to that of the Homeric epic for the protection of Patroclus' dead), around which a ferocious battle is fought. The epic poet of the 4th c. A.D. describes the war scenes and his persons speak -so there are many scenes full of infinite emotion, and in particular, sadness and grief, which are expressed by Ajax, Phoenix, Briseis, Thetis, Agamemnon and the whole Achaean army. It is noteworthy that nature, especially the sea (connected with Achilles) understand and participate in human suffering. Briseis' words once again remember those she addresses to her beloved, as she calls him, in Ovid's work. The innovation of Quintus Smyrnaeus lies in the fact that it is the oldest surviving work that covers the above events, since the archaic works of the Epic Circle (*Aethiopis*, *Iliupersis*, *Ilias* *Mikra*), which he knew and drew his material from. A similar effort has been made by Proclus, in his *Chrestomathia*, which summarizes these lost works. So, *Posthomerica* combine war moments but also moments of intense emotion, such as the Ovid’s and Statius’ works ∙ most importantly: *Posthomerica* is a unique case of a thorough presentation of what happened after the end of the *Iliad*!

Another special case, as mentioned above, is that of Philostratus’ *Heroicus*: in this long dialogue, the main characters are a vine-tender, resident of the Thracian peninsula, and a Phoenician traveler, excluded in the area due to a storm. The information about the Trojan War, the heroes who took part and what happened, is supposed to come from discussions of the vine-tender with the first Greek warrior who was killed in Troy, Protesilaus. The remarkable characteristic of this work is the tendency of "correction" of Homer’s narration and the "revelation" of the truth, bearing in mind the work of Dio of Prusa, *Trojan Oration*, in which something similar is attempted. Towards the end of the *Heroicus*, information is given about Achilles' childhood, character and appearance, his relationships and actions towards others.

This is followed by Aelius Aristides’ work *Embassy Speech to Achilles*, in which the orator tries to persuade the hero to give up his anger and return to battle, bringing to the reader's mind the 9st book of the Homeric epic. Dio of Prusa in his work *Achilles* deals with Achilles-a child who lives as a trainee near the centaur Chiron. Statius’ Achilles also holds a special place, since it refers to what is happening in Scyros, a place where the Nereid's son has found a shelter in order to avoid his participation in the Trojan War, with the most important event being that of his revelation by Odysseus and Achilles' promise to return and get married with Lycomedes' daughter. Finally, Ovid’s Briseis with her supposed letter of complaints and pleas to Achilles, a letter that belongs to the poet’s work *Heroides*. The four authors deal with and present different episodes from Achilles’ life, non-war, in which he is out of action, as he usually appears in epic tradition, and this is related to the time’s literary context that prefers to highlight lesser known events. Remarkable is the similarity that is presented between Statius’ and Ovid’s texts, which have as reference text the 6th book of *Iliad*. Specifically, in *Iliad* Andromache’s moving and emotional speech to Hector, who calls him as her only protector and begs him not to fight (pp. 406-439). With similar words, the Augustan poet’s Briseis speaks to her "beloved one"; Deidameia addresses him with pleading words before his departure (in Statius).

In conclusion, the issue of the worship and the image of Achilles seems to be quite popular at this time. Surely all these works should be familiar to the reader of the time in order to be able to recognize the "innovations" of the Roman era and the continuation of the tradition, in relation to the life and worship of the hero. Knowing the previous tradition, then, presupposes a *doctus* reader, as required by the data of the literary period, that of the Second Sophistic.

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