ACHILLES AT SCYROS, AND ONE OF HIS FANS:
THE *EPITHALAMIUM OF ACHILLES AND DEIDAMEIA*
(*BUC. GR. 157–158 GOW*)

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The *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidameia* is a poem whose beginning (the first 31 and a half lines) has come down to us in the collection of anonymous texts appended to the Bucolic sylloge in two manuscripts of the Laurentian family, which suggest the title ῾Επιθαλάμιος ᾿Αχιλλέως καὶ Δηιδαμείας for it. The ms. Tr also ascribed the poem to Theocritus, probably for no other reason apart from the title, since the Theocritean *Epithalamium of Helen and Menelaus* (*Id. 18*) also contained mythological characters. The title transmitted in the manuscripts was probably a late and general editorial classification based on the fact that the main narrative in the surviving part of the text deals with the courting of Deidameia by a cross-dressing Achilles, which at least in part takes place in a bed-chamber. In fact, the poem has none of the features of the archaic lyric genre of the ἐπιθαλάμιον or of a text like the Theocritean *Epithalamium of Helen and Menelaus*, which is a hexameter adaptation of this original lyric genre. Instead, this episode of Achilles’ erotic life is one of those short but self-contained mythological/erotic stories which are usually labelled “epyllia,” even though it is introduced by a brief bucolic dialogue between two shepherds in lines 1–9. This combination of dialogic-bucolic setting in the first lines and mythological/erotic tone of the narrative proper gives the poem a complex bucolic-erotic flavour, and makes it easily understandable in the context of an (ex-)bucolic/erotic poetics, such as that advertized in Bion’s fr. 9 and 10 (see below).

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As Statius claims at the beginning of his *Achilleid*, many parts of Achilles’ life were foreign to the Homeric epic: *quamquam acta viri multum incita / cantu Maenonio, sed plura vacant eqs.* (“the hero’s deeds, it is true, are

\footnote{So X; ᾿Επιθαλάμιον Tr before correction.}
much famed in Maeonian song, but more are yet to celebrate etc.,” 1.3–4).2 Certainly Achilles’ youth was, as a whole, a theme foreign to Homer, or was at least passed over in silence by him,3 with no hint of his cross-dressing at Scyros—yet this was the episode that the Flavian poet narrated most extensively in the first Book, before his plan of creating a full biography of Achilles was interrupted.4

In the *Iliad*, when Odysseus and Nestor wanted to enlist Achilles for the Trojan War, they went to Peleus’ house and not to Scyros (11.769–775). From *Od.* 11.506–509, however, we know that Odysseus went “by ship” to Scyros in order to recruit Achilles’ son Neoptolemos to join the war, and in *Il.* 19.326 Achilles’ son Neoptolemos is said to be growing up on Scyros. In light of the description of Scyros as a city (*Il.* 9.668: Ἔνυῆος πτολίεθρον) that Achilles conquered, the ancients disputed whether Homer’s “Scyros” was the island of the Sporades located off the East coast of Euboea, or a city (cf. Σ ad loc.). While there is no mention in the *Iliad* of Achilles’ cross-dressing and love affair with Deidameia on the island, the hint at Neoptolemos being raised in Scyros might in principle presuppose this affair. It is difficult to reconcile a love story, however, with the reference to Achilles’ conquest of Scyros which occurs at *Il.* 9.668.5 Therefore, the issue of whether or not Homer knew of the cross-dressing episode is usually solved by modern scholars, in one way or the other, according to their willingness to accept the idea of Homer knowing but passing over in silence (vs. simply ignoring) narratives which featured in the poems of the epic cycle. According to Proclus’ summary of the *Cypria* (PEG p. 41 =

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3 As was already observed by some of the ancient Homeric scholars: cf. Eustath. ad *Il.* 9.666–668 (782.47–49). Curiously enough, it was precisely Achilles’ education and cross-dressing that became the two most popular themes in the iconography of Achilles in the Roman world from the first century AD onwards; see Cameron (2009). Statius’ attention to, and celebration of, Roman villas, which is visible in many occasional poems of the *Silvae*, may have influenced the amount of space allotted to Achilles’ cross-dressing in the *Achilleid* (see Konstan [1997] 83).
4 Statius clearly intended to tell the whole story of Achilles’ life, and so an extended treatment of his heroic deeds at Troy would have been unavoidable for him. As Aricò (1996) 198–199 has recently warned, it would be rash to infer from what he actually wrote on Achilles’ youth that Statius intended to also privilege the unheroic and romantic aspects of Achilles’ life after Scyros. However, it may be a telling indication of Statius’ own attraction to Achilles’ youth that most of the allusions to Achilles in the *Silvae* concern Chiron and Scyros: *Silv.* 1.2.215–217; 2.1.88–89; 2.6.30–31; 5.3.193–194; Dilke (1954) 6–7.
5 Although, Statius may have attempted to reconcile Achilles’ love for Deidameia and his subsequent sack of Scyros; cf. Cameron (2009) 21.