



# Subeunt Amazones: Tracing the Amazons in Statius' Achilleid

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## ***Subeunt Amazones: tracing the Amazons in Statius' Achilleid***

**Abstract.** This article investigates the presence of Amazonian imagery in Statius' *Achilleid*. It begins by uncovering intertexts to *Aeneid* 1 in the arrival of Ulysses and Diomedes on Scyros (*Ach.* 1.726-58), which create a layer of erotic tension that is vital for the interpretation of the ensuing simile of Achilles, Deidamia and Lycomedes' daughters with Amazons (*Ach.* 1.758-60). A comprehensive analysis of the simile allows a re-examination of Statius' echoes to the portrayals of Hippolyte and Theseus in *Thebaid* 12, and draws attention to previously unnoticed parallels with Virgil's *Aeneid*. The final section of the article examines the larger context of the Amazon simile, eliciting intertextual points of contact with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7, and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* 5, emphasising in particular the importance of the underlying recruitment theme. Statius' deployment of Amazonian imagery in the *Achilleid* is seen to be intrinsically tied to the poem's gender fluidity, and the poet's innovative narrative technique.

## ***Subeunt Amazones: tracing the Amazons in Statius' Achilleid***

As Greece prepares for an unprecedented Trojan War (*Ach.* 1.441-66), a Greek embassy arrives on Scyros to fetch Achilles, the final piece of the epic puzzle (*Ach.* 1.689-725). Ulysses and Diomedes are welcomed by the elderly king Lycomedes, whose daughters, and the *faux puella* among them, at the beginning of a banquet are compared to Amazons returning from a hunt (*Ach.* 1.758-60). Achilles gazes in rapt attention at the new heroes before him: the climactic end of the cross-dressing at the heart of the *Achilleid* is nearing.

This article focuses its attention on the scene's pervasive Amazonian imagery, considering closely its literary precedents and its implications for the poem's narrative. I elicit in full its highly charged, erotic component through a juxtaposition of Aeneas' arrival in Carthage in *Aeneid* 1, drawing attention to the element of subjection that characterises Achilles. The aspects of excitement and novelty, combined with an emphasis on the gaze, reach their climax with the Amazon simile. I advance previous arguments of an intertextual connection to Theseus and the Amazon Hippolyte in *Thebaid* 12, which traditionally cast Achilles in the role of Theseus, and Deidamia in that of the queen.<sup>1</sup> The final section of the article reconsiders the structure that frames this "Amazonian" narrative. I compare the attempts of Minos and Cephalus to gather allies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7 to Ulysses' actions and speech to Lycomedes. Statius draws from Ovid, emphasising particularly the "recruitment" theme that runs parallel to the banquet scene. This military leitmotif, read alongside Amazonian symbolism, engenders a further parallel to Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* 5, and his treatment of the Amazons, a version to which I suggest Statius is alluding.

### **1. *Carthaginiensis Scyros***

Architecturally examined by Bettenworth and Ripoll and falling within "arrival" and "banquet" scenes in ancient epic, the Greeks' advent on Scyros sets itself against an overdetermined tradition, finding parallels in Homer, Virgil, and Statius' *Thebaid*.<sup>2</sup> Its various interpretive

levels overlap, in a way that gives the impression of a condensation of narrative *topoi*. The scene is, simultaneously, many things. It is, in due course, a genuine embassy of war, covered by a pretext, where hospitality-type elements have been subversively preceded, and distorted, by features deriving from military observation and *nyktomachies*.<sup>3</sup> These latter elements are most profoundly felt in the aggressive wolves simile of Ulysses and Diomedes (*Ach.* 1.704-8), reworking elements of the Homeric *Doloneia*, as well as the simile of Ulysses as a hunter (*Ach.* 1.742-9), which forebodes violence, and turns Achilles into the unwitting prey.<sup>4</sup> This presentation adds tension and suspicion ahead of the first encounter between the soldiers and the Scyrian royals.

The poet, however, subverts expectations once the Greeks begin their interaction. Whilst on the surface their arrival signals the return of martial epic into focus, the scene sits teasingly on the cusp between the poem's two major, and seemingly irreconcilable, differences, *amor* vs. *virtus*.<sup>5</sup> Erotic nuances (albeit not necessarily precluding latent violence) abound.<sup>6</sup> This is partly due to Lycomedes' flaunting of his daughters (another Homeric resonance, more on this below) as brides for these potential suitors (*Ach.* 1.782-3: *nunc ipsi viresque meas et cara videtis / pignora: quando novos dabit haec mihi turba nepotes?*; "now you yourselves can see my strength and my dear children; when shall this crowd deliver me new grandsons?").<sup>7</sup> Deidamia and her sisters are rendered as ready for marriage (*Ach.* 1.291-2: *...et expleto teneri iam fine pudoris / virginitas matura toris annique tumentes*; "they had arrived at the end of their tender modesty, their maidenhood and their flourishing years, ripe for the marriage bed").<sup>8</sup> This marital element becomes even more apparent when substantiated by yet another delay to the epic's teleology, prompted by Ulysses' need to get closer to Achilles:

ille quoque incepto paulum ex sermone remittit,  
 pauca tamen iungens: "At tu tranquillus in alta  
 pace mane carisque para conubia natis,  
 quas tibi sidereis divarum voltibus aequas

fors dedit. ut me olim tacitum reverentia tangit!  
is decor et formae species permixta virili.”  
occurrit genitor: “Quid si aut Bacchea ferentes  
orgia, Palladias aut circum videris aras?  
et dabimus, si forte novus cunctabitur auster.”

(*Ach.* 1.806-14)

Ulysses lets go of a part of the speech he had begun, but he adds a few words: “But you, tranquil, do remain in profound peace, and prepare the marriage rites for your cherished offspring. Fortune gave you daughters equal in starry countenance to goddesses. Their timidity has moved me for a while, as I was silent! What appeal, what beauty mixed with a manly allure!”. And the father replies: “What if you were to see them holding the insignia of Bacchus or around the altars of Pallas? And we will give you this chance, if, fortuitously, a new rising of the South wind will delay its coming”.

A Homeric Ulysses manipulates Lycomedes’ prospect of marrying off his daughters in a metaliterary game of allusivity, as he recalls an earlier sojourn of his, where an old father, Alcinous, had tried to give his daughter Nausicaa in marriage (*Od.* 6.66-7; *Od.* 7.309-16).<sup>9</sup> Lycomedes promises a future spectacle for the heroes, if by chance (*forte*), the Auster’s delay allows the guest to stay longer on the island.<sup>10</sup> His wish is quickly granted.

The most markedly suggestive element ahead of the Amazon simile is Ulysses’ gaze, whose scrutiny creates a tangible layer of erotic tension.<sup>11</sup> The sexually charged undertones come to the surface as we focalise the scene through his intrusive, active male gaze, a “revealing, disquieting and rather revolting experience”:<sup>12</sup>

tum vero intentus vultus ac pectora Ulixes  
perlibrat visu, sed nox inlataque fallunt  
lumina et extemplo latuit mensura iacentum.  
at tamen erectumque genas oculisque vagantem  
nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris  
defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat.

(*Ach.* 1.761-6)

Then Ulysses, determined, indeed stares at, with his vision, the appearance and chests of the girls, but the night and the lamps brought in trick his gaze, and without delay, as they lie down, their proportions are concealed. Nevertheless, he turns intently his scrutiny upon one of them with straight stare and wandering eyes, who does not maintain any sign of virginal modesty, and he indicates her to his companion with a sidelong glance.

He is scanning (*perlibrat*) not only the girls' *vultus* but their *pectora*, to catch the *absence* of breasts.<sup>13</sup> Deidamia, aware of the tell-tale sign, ensures to cover up Achilles' bare chest (*Ach.* 1.768-9: *...nudataque pectora semper / exsertasque manus umerosque in veste teneret*; "[had Deidamia] not always held his naked chest, uncovered arms and shoulders in his gown").<sup>14</sup>

These erotic resonances are augmented by drawing out the pervasive influence of *Aeneid* 1 and the reception of Aeneas in Carthage.<sup>15</sup> The intertextual echoes cluster around the banquet preparations and the entrance of these "Amazons":

Rumor in arcana iamdudum perstrepit aula,  
virginibus qua fida domus, venisse Pelasgum  
ductores Graiamque ratem sociosque receptos.  
iure pavent aliae, sed vix nova gaudia celat  
Pelides avidusque novos heroas et arma  
vel talis vidisse cupit. iamque atria fervent  
regali strepitu et picto discumbitur ostro<sup>16</sup>,  
cum pater ire iubet natas comitesque pudicas  
natarum. subeunt, quales Maeotide ripa,  
cum Scythicas rapuere domos et capta Getarum  
moenia, sepositis epulantur Amazones armis.

(*Ach.* 1.750-60)

In the meantime, Rumour reverberated within the inmost rooms of the palace, the safe haven of the virgins, announcing that leaders of the Greeks had arrived on Scyros, and a Greek ship and its crew had been welcomed. Some of the women are rightly afraid, but the son of Peleus can scarcely hide his new joy, as he is eager to see the new heroes and weapons, even as he is. And already the halls are bustling with regal clang and they lie down on decorated purple, when

the father orders his daughters and their undefiled companions to advance. They enter, just as Amazons on Maeotis' banks, after they have pillaged Scythian homes and captured the towns of the Getae, and they dine with arms placed aside.

The reworking of the reception scene in *Aeneid* 1 momentarily casts Ulysses in the Aeneas role, that of an outsider in a foreign land.<sup>17</sup> The Virgilian echoes are numerous.<sup>18</sup> The hemistich *ratem sociosque receptos* echoes Achates' words to Aeneas (*Aen.* 1583: *classem sociosque receptos*).<sup>19</sup> The beds' decorations on which the guests recline recall Dido's embroidered couches (*Aen.* 1.700: *stratoque super discumbitur ostro*; "and they recline on the purple coverlets"; *Aen.* 1.707-8: *nec non et Tyrii per limina laeta frequentes / convenere; toris iussi discumbere pictis*; "the Tyrians, assembled in great numbers, gather in throngs throughout the festive hall and are summoned to recline on the embroidered couches"). The fervent noise of the preparations, rising up to the ample ceilings (*Aen.* 1.725-6: *fit strepitus tectis vocemque per ampla volutant / atria*; "noise rises up to the roofs of the palace and voices spread through the ample halls"), is reworked by Statius both in the halls' description (...*iamque atria fervent / regali strepitu*), and Rumour's own report (*perstrepit*).<sup>20</sup> Even the way in which the Carthaginians admire Aeneas' gifts (*Aen.* 1.709: *mirantur dona Aeneae*; "they admire the gifts of Aeneas") is mirrored in Achilles' own desire to see both men and weapons (*Pelides avidusque novos heroas et arma / vel talis vidisse cupit*), the latter recurrently labelled as gifts.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. *Subeunt Amazones*

The situational parallel with *Aeneid* 1 draws out the suggestive, erotic elements in the Greeks' arrival on unwarlike Scyros, and augments the sense of exhilarating expectancy ahead of the girls' entrance.<sup>22</sup> This eroticization of landscape and characters, I suggest, finds its zenith in the simile, where Lycomedes' daughters are compared to the fierce warriors returning from a raid (1.758-60 above). The simile, a significant moment in the poem, illustrates well Statius' innovative narrative technique, as he breaks with the tradition of Amazon similes in Latin

literature, usually deployed instead at epic junctions (e.g., battles and heroic catalogues).<sup>23</sup> His penchant for paradox comes to the fore: masculine-looking, chaste maidens are rendered as warlike women warriors, an image that accentuates the gender fluidity of the poem as a whole.<sup>24</sup> The paradox continues: the Amazons' overt disconnection from their weaponry (*sepositis... armis*) jars with their seemingly tangential role within a banquet scene, but it is a detail that simultaneously calls attention to the importance that they will soon have in the narrative.<sup>25</sup>

The simile is deployed as a dramatic necessity to stage a cat-and-mouse game between Ulysses and Deidamia.<sup>26</sup> The physical proximity allows Ulysses to observe the girls' physiognomy, whilst Deidamia becomes a sentinel of Achilles' constructed behaviour.<sup>27</sup> A dramatic requirement, it is subordinate to the broader context that needs for the girls to dine whilst reclining.<sup>28</sup> Statius' emphasis on the altered contextualisation becomes clearer when we juxtapose the Amazon simile in *Aeneid* 11, where Camilla's companions, Larina, Tulla and Tarpeia are likened to Hippolyte and Penthesilea battling like Thracian Amazons with decorated weapons (*Aen.* 11.660: *et pictis bellantur Amazones armis*; "and the Amazons battle with painted weapons"). Bessone's formulation of a Statian quasi-parodic, "impertinent" allusivity is particularly suitable here: Statius draws from Virgil, as the line discloses an undeniable equivalence (*sepositis epulantur Amazones armis*), but re-contextualises it.<sup>29</sup> And it is the conspicuous change from *bellari* to *epulari* that signals the swift movement from gynomachic to sympotic context.

The simile acts as a mirror for Deidamia and Achilles' ephebic appearances, the latter an Amazon in the making before Thetis' eyes.<sup>30</sup> Hinds argues that the simile is a result of Achilles' contamination of the girls' collective femininity.<sup>31</sup> Feeney's link to the false etymology of *Amazon* (privative alpha + *mastos*) as "missing one breast" corroborates this, as Ulysses is in charge of discovering *the Amazon par excellence* here, Achilles, and his absence of two



breasts.<sup>32</sup> The main equivalence of Amazon and Achilles is reinforced by the warriors' actions: they are returning from raiding Scythian houses (*Scythicas rapuere domos*) and seizing the Getae's ramparts.<sup>33</sup> Their activities find a match in Achilles' own behaviour, as he is seen pillaging the Centaurs' houses and stealing their cattle (*Ach.* 1.153-4: *raptasque domos abstractaque coram / armenta*, "[The Centaurs...complain] of pillaged homes and livestock snatched away before their eyes", with *domos* in the same metrical position as 759).<sup>34</sup>

I suggest that the Amazon simile is not extraneous to the erotic element at work. Their presence triggers a remarkable reaction: whilst seemingly fierce, and treated as threatening Others, these transgressive women wind up "tamed, despised, desired as a sex object who is fascinating in [their] Otherness, but objectified and belittled by that desire".<sup>35</sup> The choice of simile to describe the first appearance of the girls to the Greek troops complements well their presentation as "marriage material". Coupled with the male gaze incessantly raking through the womanly "ranks", Achilles and these women are constructed as erotic objects to be passively observed in their exceptionality. Davis rightly compares an earlier passage in the *Thebaid*, the description of Theseus' return from his conquest of the Amazons (*Theb.* 12.523-8), drawing associations between the figures of Hippolyte and Deidamia, and Theseus and Achilles.<sup>36</sup> Hippolyte is pregnant to Theseus, Deidamia has borne a child to Achilles, both heroes will soon abandon their lovers in favour of another string of women.<sup>37</sup> The scenes have two common elements: the Amazons' detachment from their weapons, and Statius' only other reference to lake Maeotis:<sup>38</sup>

ante ducem spolia et, duri Mavortis imago,  
virginei currus cumulataque fercula cristis  
et tristes ducuntur equi truncaequae bipennes,  
quis nemora et solidam Maeotida caedere suetae,  
gorytique leves portantur et ignea gemmis  
cingula et informes dominarum sanguine peltae.

(*Theb.* 12.523-8)

Before the leader the spoils are led, and, image of harsh Mars, the chariots of the maidens and barrows filled with helmets' crests, and sad horses and broken double axes, with which these women were accustomed to fell groves and the frozen lake Maeotis; nimble quivers, belts alight with precious stones and crescent-shaped shields, horrid with the blood of their womanly masters, are being brought in.

The parallel is manifest, but the scene's prevalent Amazonian backdrop invites further scrutiny. The passage continues with a description of the Amazons:

ipsae autem nondum trepidae sexumve fatentur,  
nec vulgare gemunt, aspernanturque precari,  
et tantum innuptae quaerunt delubra Minervae.

(*Theb.* 12.529-531)

Nevertheless, they themselves show no fear, yet, nor do they confess their sex; they do not lament publicly, and they reject supplicating, as they only seek the shrine of virgin Minerva.

Their portrayal during Theseus' paradoxically Roman *triumphus* shows them *not yet* afraid, as they do not behave like ordinary women, only seeking the shrine of unwedded Minerva.<sup>39</sup> Lycomedes' daughters, likewise, celebrate and honour the rituals for *Palladi litoreae*, "Athena/Minerva of the Beach" (*Ach.* 1.285, repeated at 1.813).<sup>40</sup> Walking in the footsteps of a towering Nausicaa, Deidamia is soon singled out by Achilles (*Ach.* 1.293-8), compared to a softer Minerva, were the goddess able to lower her Gorgonian *aegis* (*Ach.* 1.299-300: *atque ipsi par forma deaest, si pectoris angues / ponat et exempta pacetur casside vultus*, "and she would be identical to the goddess in countenance, if she were to lower the snakes from her chest, and, casting off her helmet, would soften her expression"). The parallel between Amazons and Minerva via virginity and bellicosity has a distinctly Flavian flavour. Valerius elevates the Amazons to divine status, as the warrior women's strength is precisely compared to that of the unwedded goddess by the seer Phineus, who urges the Argonauts not to disembark on their shores (Val. Fl. 4.604-5: *sed quanta viris insultat Enyo / divaque Gorgonei gestatrix*

*innuba monstri*; “[and] of such strength as Enyo has taunting men, or the virgin goddess, Minerva, bearing the monstrous Gorgon”).<sup>41</sup> The women on Scyros, and virile Deidamia in particular, fit well this Amazonian pattern.

The description of Hippolyte, I suggest, is crucial for our simile:

nec non populos in semet agebat  
Hippolyte, iam blanda genas patiensque mariti  
foederis. hanc patriae ritus fregisse severos  
Atthides oblique secum mirantur operto  
murmure, quod nitidi crines, quod pectora palla  
tota latent, magnis quod barbara semet Athenis  
misceat atque hosti veniat paritura marito.

(*Theb.* 12.533-9)

And Hippolyte too is drawing the people to herself, now that she appears with a soft gaze and enduring the bond of the marriage. The women of Athens, with hushed murmur, look upon Hippolyte with sidelong glances, Hippolyte who has broken the harsh customs of her fatherland, as her hair is smooth and her chest completely covered by a mantle, and who has melded herself with great Athens, and who will bear children to her inimical husband.

“*procreatrix* and *domiseda*” following her captor Theseus, a downcast Hippolyte (*blanda genas*) appears to us quite literally tamed, the queen of the Amazons in the guise of a “model Greek wife”, ready for forced motherhood.<sup>42</sup> Her taming process is twofold. First, via the brushing of the hair (*quod nitidi crines*), a grooming that starkly recalls Achilles’ own domestication at the hands of Pygmalionesque Thetis (*Ach.* 1.328: *et inpexos certo domat ordine crines*; “and she tames his unkempt hair by arranging it in precise order”, repeated in the simile with Diana, as Latona “composes” her daughter, *Ach.* 1.348: *sparsosque tumet componere crines*, “and she is proud to arrange her messy hair”).<sup>43</sup> Secondly, through the clothing itself: the reference to Hippolyte’s dress-code, which covers both breasts instead of

one (in Amazonian fashion) mirrors Deidamia's attempt to shield (read "continue taming") Achilles, and to urge him to sustain the enactment of female modesty:<sup>44</sup>

quid nisi praecipitem blando complexa moneret  
Deidamia sinu nudataque pectora semper  
exsertasque manus umerosque in veste teneret  
et prodire toris et poscere vina vetaret  
saepius et fronti crinale reponeret aurum?

(*Ach.* 1.766-70)

And what would have happened had Deidamia not admonished the hurrying young man, clutching him in her soft embrace, always held his naked chest, uncovered arms and shoulders in his gown, and repeatedly prohibited him from coming forth from the couches and from asking for wine, and replaced the golden hair band on his brow?

Just as Thetis/Latona had done, she tries to cover Achilles in vain (*Ach.* 1.347-8: *ipsa arcum pharetrasque locat vestemque latentem / deducit*; "she disposes of bow and quiver, and draws down the hiding gown"). The clothes, the shameful "proof" around which the *Achilleid* revolves, become even more significant: they feature again at the end of the Scyrian episode, where a changed Achilles (*Ach.* 2.9-10: *omnia visu / mutatus*; "his appearance completely changed") is standing as leader and warrior before the Scyrians, who are gazing upon him "as with breast stripped of the purple cloak" (*Ach.* 2.5: *et iam punicea nudatum pectora palla*).<sup>45</sup> *nudatus* here conveys Achilles' return to conventional (epic) clothing, but also the paradoxical "freedom" that his *undressing* represents for his *pectora*. He can finally play the Amazon role (i.e., with the uncovered breasts) more appropriate for him (cf. Catullus' prophetic words at 64.339: *forti pectore notus*, "well-known [to his enemies] for his mighty chest"), as we saw his naked chest being frantically covered by Deidamia (*nudataque pectora...*), and again during the anagnorisis, as his clothes, still intact, inexplicably fall from his body (*Ach.* 1.878: *illius intactae cecidere a pectore vestes*; "the clothes fell, untouched, from his chest").

Achilles' Amazonian role bursts out of the simile's confines. In an ironic twist, the description of his unclothed arms (*exsertasque manus*) recalls Penthesilea's own bared breasts as depicted on the walls of Juno's temple in Carthage (*Aen.* 1.492: *aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae*; "she binds a golden belt below her naked breast").<sup>46</sup> Achilles, like Penthesilea, is turned into the object of both the internal (Ulysses') and external (the audience's) gaze.<sup>47</sup> The hero's bodily description as an imagined (Virgilian) Amazon during the banquet stands out against his own traditional portrayal on the temple's walls, as he drives Trojans out (*Aen.* 1.466-8), slays Troilus (1.474-8), drags Hector's body (1.483-4) and returns it to Priam (1.485-7), and kills Memnon and Penthesilea (1.488-90).<sup>48</sup> In a remarkable twist, Statius paradoxically portrays Achilles in the guise of his own Amazonian casualty. The poet offers, in a *Ringkomposition* of *ekphrasis*, as it were, an earlier iconographical snippet of Achilles not only in a less martial setting, but also passivized.

The clothes further tie Hippolyte and Achilles. Her most famous mythic account involves her golden *zoster*, a gift of Ares, which attested to her right to rule over the Amazons.<sup>49</sup> Its "retrieval", Hercules' 9<sup>th</sup> Labour, is a mission that results in the first encounter between Greeks and Amazons.<sup>50</sup> Albeit with a number of variants in its outcome, the myth ultimately ends in subjugation and despoliation of the Amazon queen.<sup>51</sup> The motif of the removal of the belt, the object that marks the divide between female freedom and suppression, is replicated in the *Achilleid*, as Ulysses embarks upon an expedition with the primary aim of removing Achilles' feminine clothing, which in our scene Deidamia is desperately trying to preserve fastened (*saepius et fronti crinale reponeret aurum*, perhaps a fittingly golden hairband).<sup>52</sup> Ulysses' mission, designated as *labor* by Diomedes (*Ach.* 1.539: *Nos vocat iste labor*), is clear, as Calchas' frenzied orders dictate: Achilles must be undressed (*Ach.* 1.533-4: *o scelus! en fluxae veniunt in pectora vestes. / scinde, puer, scinde et timidae ne cede parenti*; "Oh, the crime! See, graceful garments come upon his breast. Tear them, boy, tear them, nor yield to

your timid mother”).<sup>53</sup> This instruction calls for the obliteration of Achilles’ feminine component, just as the snatching of Hippolyte’s *zoster* represents the conquering male triumph over a defeated female alien foe.<sup>54</sup> Ulysses’ “Herculean” agency is underscored: whilst Achilles might have already started loosening his clothes (*Ach.* 1.874-5: *iam pectus amictu / laxabat*), the miraculous undressing occurs only after Agyrtes’ signal with the trumpet (*Ach.* 1.875-6: *cum grande tuba sic iussus Agyrtes / insonuit*), ordered by Ulysses (*Ach.* 1.724-5).

Davis’ juxtaposition of Deidamia/Hippolyte and Achilles/Theseus must therefore be reconsidered, as the simile’s ambiguous hues call for a similarly fluid approach. Their mirroring characterisations encourage a more changeable interpretation, as the simile engulfs them simultaneously.<sup>55</sup> For Deidamia, the equation with an Amazon is pertinent: as a masculine-looking girl, a devotee of Pallas Athena, and ready to fight off the men’s intrusion on Scyros, she embodies the polyvalent epithet of ἀντίανδρα (“a match for men”).<sup>56</sup> Deidamia gains a voice after the rape in the woods (*Ach.* 1.640-5) and after giving birth, analogously to Argia’s own transgressive stance in the *Thebaid*, where she adopts a masculine role only after discarding her virginal *pudor* (albeit for different purposes).<sup>57</sup> The Amazon simile is suitable for Deidamia, who acts as a feminine foil to Ulysses: he is *providus*, “foreseeing” (*Ach.* 1.542; 1.698), but she is too (*Ach.* 1.802-3: *provida... Deidamia*). Her unconventional behaviour culminates in a request to follow Achilles into battle (*Ach.* 1.949-50: *quin age, duc comitem; cur non ego Martia tecum / signa feram?*; “let me, take me as your companion: why should I not carry the standards of Mars with you?”), a very Amazonian thing to do indeed (*Ach.* 1.352-3).<sup>58</sup> Hippolyte is exemplary for Deidamia, as the former would have too joined Theseus against Creon had it not been for her new role as mother (*Theb.* 12.635-6: *isset et Arctois Cadmea ad moenia ducens / Hippolyte turmas*; “Hippolyte would have gone too, leading Arctic squadrons against the walls of Cadmus”).<sup>59</sup>

The simile, on the other hand, highlights Achilles' contradictory situation. Like Theseus, he has relied on sexual violence to assert his masculinity, but he winds up a little longer in a submissive situation. That this is an unwilling condition is clear: he cannot retain his *pudor*-like appearance (*nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris*), and unlike Hippolyte (*blanda genas*), he maintains his gaze literally "erect" (*erectumque genas*). To return to a martial sphere and to repossess his nature, he must repudiate his feminine side, the grooming and clothes.<sup>60</sup> The Athenian women witnessing Theseus' arrival in the *Thebaid* look upon Hippolyte askance (*Atthides oblique secum mirantur operto / murmure*), "censoring" *sottovoce* the queen who has abandoned her customs.<sup>61</sup> Ulysses fixes his sidelong (perhaps even disapproving) gaze upon an unrecognisable Achilles (*defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat*).<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the clothing, the weapons also play an important part. In the *Thebaid*, Statius explicitly shifts the focus onto them:

isset et Arctoas Cadmea ad moenia ducens  
 Hippolyte turmas: retinet iam certa tumentis  
 spes uteri, coniunxque rogat dimittere curas  
 Martis et emeritas thalamo sacrare pharetras.

(*Theb.* 12.635-8)

Hippolyte would have gone too, leading Arctic squadrons against the walls of Cadmus, but the now certain hope of her swelling womb holds her back, and her husband pleads with her to forget worries of war, and to consecrate her quiver, its duty finished, in/to the marriage chamber.

Already construed as battle spoils (*Theb.* 12.523-8), the weapons reoccur in Hippolyte's description only to stress their marginal power: these Amazons, defeated, disarmed and tamed, are now consecrating their weapons to the marital chamber.<sup>63</sup> The peripheral presence of the *arma* in the *Achilleid* – either placed underneath (*suppositis*) or aside (*sepositis*) – can also be similarly interpreted, as an ineluctable prelude of what will be, in the end, the different fates of

the Amazons here. One is the epic warrior whose *arma* will soon be presented to him, the other is the *relicta*, who will remain firmly planted in her newly bestowed role as a mother.<sup>64</sup> The weapons act both as proleptically symbolic objects of the immediate plot development, and as aide-mémoire of gender norms. But while the Amazon simile may not truly stand as a serious threat to gender roles, it can indeed be construed as a transitory window into the potential for transgression.<sup>65</sup>

The Amazon simile therefore does not simply function as a visual aid: with its dual different value, it offers, however momentarily, an opening for Deidamia's antagonistic efforts, and for Achilles, a pointed parallel to a conquered Hippolyte in a moment that lays bare his restrained condition. Statius does not deploy the simile simply as a subordinate dramatic necessity to stage the convivial exchange: rather, he provides the reader with a crucial interpretative and intertextual key to understand power dynamics of gender at the heart of the *Achilleid*.

### **3. *The Recruiting Sergeant***

Now, structurally speaking, prior to the Amazon simile, Ulysses' first speech to Lycomedes that sets the scene lures the reader into thinking that this will be a double for Aeneas' reception by Evander, as the presence of a peace-bringing olive branch is unique in the incipit of these two banquet scenes (*Aen.* 8.115-6: *tum pater Aeneas puppi sic fatur ab alta / paciferaeque manu ramum praetendit olivae*; "then father Aeneas thus spoke from the ship's high stern, holding in his hand a branch of peaceful olive"; *Ach.* 1.727: *et ostensa pacem praefatus oliva*, "and he spoke of peace holding out an olive branch").<sup>66</sup> The essential framework is that of a covert embassy of war. Prompted by an oracle (Calchas) identifying a necessity (Achilles), a group of soldiers embark upon a journey to seek an indispensable ally for an upcoming war.

Whilst Statius is undoubtedly indebted to the Virgilian scene, I suggest that he also relies on another model: Ovid's version of Minos' attempt to garner allies (*Met.* 7.451-517). The intertext with Ovid accentuates the recruitment theme that runs deep at the core of the scene.



Upon his arrival to Aegina, Minos is greeted by Achilles' own grandfather, Aeacus, and his three sons, Telamon, Peleus, and Phocus. Aeacus, like Lycomedes, is too old for war (*Met.* 7.478-9: *ipse quoque egreditur tardus gravitate senili / Aeacus et, quae sit veniendi causa, requirit*; "Aeacus himself also advanced, delayed by the weight of the years, and asked the cause of his arrival"; *Ach.* 1.776: *utinam et mihi fortior aetas*, "if only my own age were stronger") but unlike the Scyrian king with his female progeny (*Ach.* 1.781-2), Aeacus does have male offspring ready for war (*Met.* 7.507-11). The Ovidian parallel magnifies the stark contrast between ready-for-epic male offspring, and Lycomedes' all-female, unwarlike progeny, also reminding us that one of the "girls" on Scyros is actually equipped for warfare.

The adoption of common hospitality tropes reinforces the situational parallel with Ovid: once Aeacus refuses to help Minos on account of his strong ties with Athens, Cephalus arrives on the island displaying, unlike Minos, fitting *mores* of hospitality, carrying an olive branch (*Met.* 7.498: *ingreditur ramumque tenens popularis olivae*: "he advanced bearing a branch of his country's olive"). As often in Ovid, hospitality scenes are summarised and subordinated to frame the central extended narratives, and the conclusion of the tale of the Myrmidons shows that, just as in the *Achilleid*, the scene also partakes in wider hospitality motifs, as we are within a markedly convivial atmosphere (*Met.* 7.661-3: *talibus atque aliis longum sermonibus illi / implevere diem; lucis pars optima mensae / est data, nox somnis*; "with such discussions and others, they filled the long day; the last hours of light were given to a banquet, the night to sleep").<sup>67</sup>

The arrival scene in Statius, I argue, responds to Ovid's own manipulation of traditional narrative building-blocks.<sup>68</sup> First, through the abridgment of conventional epic *topoi* (the reception of a Greek embassy at the court of an old king, the symbolic olive branch, the banquet that ensues). Secondly, by subverting, in highly Ovidian fashion, the premises of these traditional elements. Ulysses cloaks the real motive of his advent (embassy of war) and offers

a fabricated alternative (reconnaissance), as he claims the Greeks' presence is needed to explore Trojan coastlines (*Ach.* 1.735-7: *imus / explorare aditus inuisaque litora Troiae, / quidve parent* – “we are on our way to explore access and hostile shores of Troy, and what they are preparing...”).<sup>69</sup> The deception in Ulysses' subterfuge better fits the ravenous twin-wolves simile earlier in the narrative (*Ach.* 1.704-8), and the framing of the mission as an investigation (*Ach.* 1.712-13: *Qua nunc verum ratione paramus / scrutari?*; “in what way are we now preparing to investigate the truth?”). The “exploration” motif in Ulysses' falsehood foreshadows the real act of scouting that will take place once he is welcomed into the palace (*Ach.* 1.742-3: *interea visu perlustrat Ulixes / scrutaturque domum*; “in the meantime, Ulysses scours with his gaze and scrutinises the house”, to be read alongside the Molossian wolf-dog simile at *Ach.* 1.746-9).

Unlike Ovid, however, Statius collapses the distinction between primary narrative (of preparations of war, hospitality) and secondary narratives (the plague at Aegina, the aetiological excursus of the Myrmidons, and the love-story of Cephalus and Procris). There is no self-contained episode enclosed within a reception scene, no subordination of “preparatory” motifs to larger digressions or other nested storylines. This narrative technique of compression draws attention to the larger context of Ulysses' arrival on Scyros. With the dissolution of narrative planes, Statius draws attention to the lack of a larger secondary narrative. We are already embedded in the epic interval, the inevitably short-lived postponement of all things epic that Achilles' Scyrian sojourn represents.<sup>70</sup> This compression of the narrative sets up the banquet scene as the backdrop of what in itself is a delaying ‘episode’ in the already deferring (extant) *Achilleid*.

The Ovidian parallel accentuates the theme of recruiting that lies beneath Ulysses' lies. This motif, enveloped within an Amazonian landscape, introduces an additional model for

Statius' scene: Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* 5, where the Argo sails past Amazonian territory:

Addit hic casu comites Fortuna benigno  
Autolycum Phlogiumque et Deileonta, secutos  
Herculis arma viros. vagus hos ibi fixerat error.  
ut Graiam videre manum puppemque Pelasgam,  
prima ruunt celeres ad litora seque precantur  
accipiant socios. nova dux accedere gaudet  
nomina desertos et iam sibi currere remos.  
transit Halys longisque fluens anfractibus Iris  
saevaue Thermodon medio sale murmura volvens  
Gradivo sacer et spoliis ditissimus amnis,  
donat equos, donat votas cui virgo secures,  
cum redit ingenti per Caspia claustra triumpho,  
Massageten Medumque trahens. est vera propago  
sanguinis, est ollis genitor deus. hinc magis alta  
Haemonidae petere et monitus non temnere Phinei.  
ipse autem comitum conversus ad ora novorum  
“vos mihi nunc pugnas” ait “et victricia” ductor  
“Herculis arma mei vestrasque in litore Martis  
interea memorate manus.” sic fatus et aegro  
corde silens audit currus bellique labores  
virginei, exciderit frenis quae prima remissis,  
semianimem patrius quam vexerit amnis in aequor,  
quae pelta latus atque umeros nudata pharetris  
fugerit Herculeae mox vulnere presa sagittae,  
utque securigeras stimulaverit Ira catervas  
fleturusque pater, quantus duce terror in ipsa,  
qui furor, insignis quo balteus arserit auro.

(Val. Fl. 5.113-39)

On this land, Fortune's favourable chance adds new comrades, Autolycus, Phlogius and Deileon, heroes who had followed Hercules' weapons and who had been fixed there by a

wandering mistake. When they saw the Greek throng and the Pelasgian ship, they rushed swiftly to the edge of the shores, and prayed that they might be taken in as companions. The leader welcomes gladly the new names, and already they operate the abandoned oars. Halys goes by, and flowing Iris with its meandering streams, and Thermodon turning its harsh murmurs in the middle of the sea, a river sacred to Mars and most abundant with spoil, as the Amazonian maiden [Hippolyte] offers horses and battle-axes as offerings, when she returns in a great triumph carrying with her, through the Caspian gates, Medes and Massagetae. This is blood's true offspring, their father the god of War. Afterward, the Thessalian men sought the deep sea, and did not scorn the warnings of Phineus. Nevertheless, the leader [Jason], having turned to face to the new companions, said "Now, in the meantime, narrate of the battles and the victorious missions of my own Hercules, as well as your own exploits on the shores of Mars". Having said this, he, silently, with heavy heart, listens of the war chariots and the labours of the virgins' wars: which one fell first having let go of the reins, and which one the stream of the father transported half-dead to the sea, and which one, stripped as of her side of her shield and the quiver from her shoulders, fled, but was soon pressed and wounded by an arrow of Hercules, and how Anger and a father, soon to be grief-stricken, were urging the axe-wielding throngs, and what terror was within the leader herself, what fury spurred her, and how the outstanding baldric blazed with gold.

After the Argonauts lose three members of their crew, Hercules, Idmon, and the helmsman Tiphys, they arrive in Amazonia. *Fortuna* favours them, as they find Autolycus, Phlogius and Deileon, companions of Hercules, propitiously cropping up to replace the missing comrades.<sup>71</sup> The reaction of these heroes at the sight of the Greek men and their Pelasgian ships, of exhilaration and urgency, resembles the response of Lycomedes' daughters to the arrivals of the Greeks on Scyros, but with opposite result. These men rush to the shores as soon as they catch sight of the Greek men (*ut Graiam videre manum puppemque Pelasgam / prima ruunt celeres ad litora*), praying to be received as companions (*accipient socios*). In the *Achilleid*, the women are warned by *Rumor*, stridently barging into their safe chambers, that the leaders and ships of the Greeks have arrived and have been welcomed as friends (*Ach.*

1.751-2: *venisse Pelasgum / ductores Graiamque ratem sociosque receptos*). The men are eager, the women afraid, the two levels that frame the scene accentuated.

Whilst the new recruits are welcomed kindly by the leader (*nova dux accedere gaudet / nomina*), Achilles can scarcely contain his newly found joy (*Ach.* 1.753-4: *sed vix nova gaudia celat / Pelides avidusque novos heroas et arma*), clearly evoking the moment where he, on Chiron's shoulders, had marvelled at the Argonautic heroes (Val. Fl. 1.262-3: *stupet in ducibus magnumque sonantes / haurit et Herculeo fert comminus ora leoni*; "he [instead] marvels at the leaders and drinks in the loud noise, and he brings himself nose to nose with the Herculean lion").<sup>72</sup> These Valerian connections might even endow the repetition of *nova* in the passage – deemed "somewhat jarring" – with a layer of irony.<sup>73</sup> Achilles' *nova gaudia* are not just a novelty reaction, but also a "recent" emotion. He may not have seen these "new heroes" before, but he had already admired other also heroes embarking on another epic journey.<sup>74</sup> The intertext underscores the irony at play, as the jubilant reception is what Achilles is secretly desiring: to have been greeted at once as a long-awaited addition to the Greeks' crew.

This interpretation gains traction when taking into account the structural frame in Valerius. Fortune's benign agency allows the Argonauts to come across the stranded men (*addidit hic casu comites Fortuna benigno*). In the *Achilleid*, Lycomedes abruptly interrupts Ulysses in the middle of his speech (*medio sermone*) and prays that *Fortuna* may assist the Greeks' enterprise. He uses *adnuerit*, an extremely rare archaising perfect subjunctive functioning instead of a present subjunctive for a wish, "perhaps with the idea of predestination":<sup>75</sup>

medio sermone intercipit ille:  
'Adnuerit Fortuna, precor, dextrique secudent  
ista dei!

(*Ach.* 1.737-9)

Lycomedes interrupts him mid speech: “May Fortune, I pray, assent and may favourable gods support this enterprise of yours!”.

Lycomedes’ naïve wish recalls the favourable Valerian Fortune (*Fortuna...ista*) that did indeed help the Greeks gain a newcomer – irony is rife, as the old Scyrian king does not know that the Greeks are ultimately looking for a new recruit in their expedition to Troy.

The Amazonian landscape is key. Valerius’ account, owing much to Apollonius’ own description (*Argon.* 2.955-1014), “picks up on a digression during Apollonius’ description of the Thermodon river, in which the story of Heracles’ ambush of the Amazon Melanippe and his subsequent ransoming of her for Hippolyte’s belt is told”.<sup>76</sup> The Amazons and their shores are ultimately to be avoided, following Phineus’ earlier advice (Val. Fl. 4.602 / 606-7: *inclita Amazonidum magnoque exorta Gradivo / gens ibi... ne tibi tunc horrenda rapax ad litora puppem / ventus agat*; “the famous tribe of Amazons, descended from mighty Mars, dwells there...do not allow then the snatching wind to carry your ship toward those dreadful shores”).<sup>77</sup> Jason will have to be content with hearing a second-hand narrative of this mini-*Heracleid*, to which he listens with a heavy heart (*et aegro / corde silens audit*).<sup>78</sup>

These Amazons, however, are not quite identical, and the altered behaviour in Statius is meaningful. In Apollonius, they are arming for battle (*Argon.* 2.995: ἔνθα Θεμισκύρεια Ἀμαζόνες ὠπλίζοντο; “where the Themiscyreian Amazons were readying their weapons”). In Valerius, their *labores virginei belli* are retold obliquely, as these warrior-women are returning from successful raids (*cum redit ingenti per Caspia claustra triumpho / Massageten Medumque trahens*), an account that allows a more in-depth chronicle of Hercules’ earlier exploits. In the *Achilleid*, Achilles and Deidamia are compared to Amazons *after* they have performed their warlike feats (*cum Scythicas rapuere domos et capta Getarum / moenia*), and as they prepare to dine (*epulantur*). I suggest that Statius, in keeping with the teasing nature of the *Achilleid*, is precisely alluding to these Apollonian and Valerian circumventions, as he

imagines a less martial, more hospitable (and erotic) scenario in which his Greeks have indeed disembarked on an Amazonian land, and meet Amazon(s)-like women.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the *Achilleid*, Statius deploys Amazonian symbolism that is steeped in intertextual connections. Ulysses' arrival and actions are imbued with strong erotic undertones that echo the arrival of Aeneas at Dido's court (as well as Odysseus at Scheria), and cast Achilles the Amazon in the passive role, as he becomes the primary erotic object of our gaze. This suggestive setting, and Achilles' subjugation, culminates in the Amazon simile (*Ach.* 1.758-60). By eliciting links with the Amazon imagery of Hippolyte in Theseus' triumph in *Thebaid* 12, the simile is seen to have polyvalent functions, which aid us in interpreting the characterisations of both Achilles and Deidamia. For Achilles, the equation with Hippolyte draws further attention to his acquired *pudor* as an unnatural condition. For Deidamia, instead, the simile acts as a trigger that enables her a moment of transgression to confront Ulysses in another epic delay. Through parallels with the frame of the Minos' episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7, Statius is seen manipulating type-scenes (arrival scenes, banquet scenes and military reconnaissance), which result in an extreme condensation of its literary precedents. Most importantly, the intertext highlights the importance of the theme of recruiting, also in the backdrop of another model for Statius' Amazonian landscape. The Amazonia digression in book 5 of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* endows the reception of the Greeks on Scyros with an element of tongue-in-cheek literary recollection, substantiating the interpretation of the Scyrian episode as an epic-delaying interval. In a poem where everything and everyone is liminal, where the epic hero (man) is not self-sufficient and whole anymore,<sup>79</sup> the multidimensional Amazons are a fitting medium to enact instants of transgression, both in terms of gender and innovative poetics.

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<sup>1</sup> Davis (2015) 167-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ripoll (2019) 13-54, for the *Achilleid* see 42-6; see also Bettenworth (2019) 59. Bitto (2016) 300-13 places this scene within the broader bracket "Odysseus und Diomedes A.1.675-818". Among these, Odysseus' reception at Scheria at Alcinous' palace and echoes of the *Doloneia*, explored by Ripoll (2020) 251 and (2019) 42-3; the reception of Aeneas in Carthage by Dido (*Aen.* 1); Ilioneus' meeting with Latinus (*Aen.* 7); Aeneas and Evander (*Aen.* 8); the arrival of Polynices and Tydeus at Adrastus' palace and the banquet (*Theb.* 1 and 2), meticulously analysed by Parkes (2008) 395-8.

<sup>3</sup> On nyktomachies, see Dinter, Finkmann and Khoo (2019).

<sup>4</sup> For their discussion, see Heslin (2005) 151; Kozák (2019) 153; Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 246-7; 252.

<sup>5</sup> Among others, Parkes (2008) 395. On this pervasive dichotomy, see Bessone (2020a) 83-4 and (2018) 186, Rosati's ground-breaking introduction to his Italian edition (1994) 5-61, and King's binary of *ardor* vs. *virtus* (1987) 183. On elegy's intertwining with epic, see Hinds (2000).

<sup>6</sup> The mustering at Aulis offers a similar blend, cf. Moul (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Parkes (2008) 397; Heslin (2005) 147-8; for a parodic reading of these lines, see Bessone (2020b) 161. Citations of the *Achilleid* follow the text of Dilke (1954) unless otherwise stated, of *Thebaid* 12 that of Pollmann (2004), and *Argonautica* 5 that of Wijsman (1996). Other texts follow their latest Loeb editions. Translations are my own.

<sup>8</sup> Panoussi (2013) 340-2 and (2019) 208 emphasises their *virginitas* as a sexual appeal for the male viewers both within and outside text.

<sup>9</sup> Ulysses replies that he is taken aback by the girls' captivating beauty mixed with a manly *je ne sais quoi*. This can be aimed at Achilles, but also Deidamia, both envisioned as potential love interests. For the important intertext with Alcinous, which enacts a comic allusive game of scenes *bis repetita*, see now Ripoll (2020) 251. This familiarity makes the aposiopesis at *Ach.*1.737: *medio sermone intercipit ille*, "Lycomedes interrupts him mid speech" even more amusing, almost as if the king were saying "yes, I do know all of this, let's get to the point".

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<sup>10</sup> On Bacchic rites, see Heslin (2005) 148: we have seen all-female Dionysiac rites before, but here the old king “has taken normally private moments of female solidarity and offered them as a kind of beauty pageant for his guests”. *forte* is ironic, as nothing truly happens by chance in the *Achilleid*: it introduces scenes carefully timed and placed, as in 1.286 (the rites to Minerva, which give way to the infatuation) and 1.730-1 (the names of Agamemnon and Menelaus, of course well-known had Lycomedes read the *Iliad*). On *forte* as signpost of a markedly Ovidian technique, see Micozzi (2015) 341 n. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Bessone (2018) explores well the poetics of vision in the *Achilleid*.

<sup>12</sup> Feeney’s description (2004) 95. Hunting pursuits are innately erotic/elegiac, as well as violent, cf. Luke (1998). On the Ovidian echoes (*Ars Am.* 3.261-6), see Bessone (2018) 183-6.

<sup>13</sup> Nuzzo (2012) 141 translates it as “indagare”, Feeney (2004) 95 renders *perlibrat visu* as “weighs up visually”, which picks up on again *visu perlustrat* at 742.

<sup>14</sup> Feeney (2004) highlights the emphasis on *-pect*.

<sup>15</sup> Nuzzo (2012) 140.

<sup>16</sup> I choose the reading of *ostro* of EBKQR, over the misprint *aulro* from *auro* of P that Dilke (1954) offers, upheld by Traglia and Aricò (1980); Rosati (1994); Ripoll and Soubiran (2008); Nuzzo (2012), thus following Garrod (1906) and Jannaccone (1950). *auro* and *ostro* both appear in the reception scene of Polynices and Tydeus at Adrastus’ palace, as Parkes argues (2008) 396: Statius here reworks the *Aeneid* and his Virgilian adaptation in the *Thebaid* (cf. also Sen. *Ag.* 877-80, and Agamemnon’s lavish description). When Adrastus receives Tydeus and Polynices, attendants are embellishing the couches with finely spun purple and gold coverlets (*Theb.* 1.517-18: *pars ostro tenues auroque sonantes / emunire toros alteque inferre tapetas*, “part of the helpers furnish the couches with delicate purple and rustling gold as they pile up the cushions”). The reading of the later mss. (*ostro*) is unequivocally Virgilian, as it recalls the welcoming scene of Aeneas and his Trojans at the court of Dido in Carthage (*Aen.* 1.700), cf. Nuzzo (2012) 140. The strong connections to the Tyrian context are evident, as *discumbere* in poetry is sharply Virgilian (an observation I gratefully owe to Alessandro Schiesaro *per litteras*). The interlinear lexical gloss reported in the 14<sup>th</sup> century ms. R (Monacensis) shows this was interpreted to be the case (*comedit(ur) sup(er) purpura(m)* (“eating is done over purples”). Achilles’ blush is also described in these terms, as his white, ivory complexion is tainted by purple dye (*Ach.* 1.308: *puniceo vel ebur corrumpitur ostro*, “[as] ivory is tainted by purple dye”). *auro* is also possible, but less likely, though it continues to strengthen the Virgilian intertext: what is golden is thought to be either the couch on which Dido is reclining (by synizesis), or the queen herself (*Aen.* 1.697-8: *cum venit, aulaeis iam se regina superbis / aurea composuit sponda mediamque*

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*locavit*; “as he arrived, the queen already laid herself on a golden couch [or “the *golden* queen already laid herself on a couch”], and, amid royal tapestries, she took her place in the middle”.

<sup>17</sup> Bessone (2020b) 160-1 invites her readers to probe contextual equivalences between the episodes.

<sup>18</sup> Albeit Statius significantly condenses the scene. In the *Thebaid*, the preparation of Adrastus’ reception spans roughly twenty-two lines (*Theb.* 1.510-32), whilst here convivial organisation takes four lines and a half in total. On brevity in the *Achilleid*, see Aricò (1986) 2940.

<sup>19</sup> Nuzzo (2012) 140.

<sup>20</sup> See also Parkes (2008) 396-7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ach.* 1.820, 1.846-7, 1.851. Bessone (2018) 185: “the gaze reveals Achilles’ pulsing passions: an ‘erotic’ thrust towards weapons, wars, the heroes”.

<sup>22</sup> *Ach.* 1.207: *inbelli...Lycomedis ab aula*; “from the palace of unwarlike Lycomedes”; 1.625: *inbelli carcere*; “an unwarlike prison”. For Scyros as a stifling feminine microcosm, see Rimell (2015) 262.

<sup>23</sup> For the simile, see Sturt (1982) 837-9; Feeney (2004) 95; Heslin (2005) 153-4; Panoussi (2013) 343-4, (2019) 210-11; Hinds (2000) 239; Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 253-4; Davis (2015) 167-8. Similes include: *Aen.* 11.659-63 (Camilla’s companions); *Pun.* 2.73-6 (Asbyrte and her *aristeia*); *Pun.* 8.428-30 (Curius and his men); *Theb.* 5.144-6 (*furor* of the Lemnian women); Val. Fl. 5.89-90 (Sthenelus). For women-warriors in post-Augustan literature, among others, see Sharrock (2015).

<sup>24</sup> For the *Achilleid* as a paradoxical epic, see Davis (2015). Roche (2015) reads paradoxes in the *Thebaid* as a narrative technique inherited from Lucan.

<sup>25</sup> *suppositis* is the mss.’s *lectio* (PBRCKQ), meaning “to dine on their weapons/with their weapons at their feet”, upheld by Jannaccone (1950), Méheust (1971), Rosati (1994) and Ripoll and Soubiran (2008). *sepositis*, Schrader’s conjecture, is espoused by Garrod (1906), Dilke (1954) and Nuzzo (2012). Amazons between warlike and convivial activities appear on the double-sided Andokides vase (Louvre F 203). On one side, it depicts Amazons in battle gear, and on the other, Amazons bathing. Mayor (2014) 120-1 argues that “the unexpected juxtaposition of women arming themselves for war and peaceful nude women bathing causes the viewer to do a double take”. For Amazons and their war-dance connected with the cult of Artemis at Ephesus (though no convivial context is explicitly found), see Mayor (2014) 151-4. For Amazons and the Greek iconographical tradition, which sees them almost exclusively as warriors, see von Bothmer (1957).

<sup>26</sup> Most recently, Ripoll (2019) 44, first posited by Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 253-4.

<sup>27</sup> Heslin (2005) 153, with emphasis on words of reclining (*iacentum, stratis*).

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<sup>28</sup> Otherwise socially unacceptable, both in Greece and Rome, cf. Heslin (2005) 153.

<sup>29</sup> Bessone (2020b) 134; Nuzzo (2012) 140 for the equivalence.

<sup>30</sup> Sturt (1982) 838 on Achilles and Deidamia's "epicene" appearances. Achilles' behaviour (or rather, that of Achilles' "sister" before Lycomedes) had been likened by Thetis to that of an Amazon (*Ach.* 1.352-3: *arma umeris arcumque animosa petebat / ferre et Amazonio conubia pelleri ritu*; "she sought, bold, to carry the weapons and bow on her shoulders, and to reject marriage in Amazonian custom"), on which see Panoussi (2019) 209-11.

<sup>31</sup> Hinds (2000) 239-40.

<sup>32</sup> Feeney (2004) 95.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Phillips *per litteras* rightly draws my attention to yet another paradox: the Amazon's primitive qualities are accentuated by a comparison to the *domos* and *moenia* of what are otherwise nomadic tribes (Scythians and Getae): they are acting as marauders of surprisingly "civilised" tribes.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reader for this observation. This interpretation is reinforced via the women's reaction (*iure pavent aliae*), as *aliae* might encompass Deidamia and her sisters, or the sisters alone. Davis (2015) 167 contends that "the women show no aversion to marriage", but perhaps their fearful reaction can attest to their abhorrence.

<sup>35</sup> Sharrock (2015) 158; Uccellini (2006) 252-3. duBois (1982) 35 identifies Amazons as erotic "objects", dangerous and alluring, to be defeated in the name of Hellenism.

<sup>36</sup> Davis (2015) 167-8; Statius does identify Deidamia among Lycomedes' daughters, but the simile also encompasses Achilles, thus disrupting once again the gender balance.

<sup>37</sup> Davis (2015) 167.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Hulls (2014) 209-11 interprets Theseus' triumph from an imperialistic viewpoint, and Heslin (2008) brings in for comparison the rape of the Sabine women, echoes to the Greek oratorical tradition, and Statius' own φιλοξενία. Note Ahl (1986) 2894 "the force of *nondum* is chilling". On the "sinister" description, see Augoustakis (2010) 79-80. Pollmann (2004) 216 notices the difference between the Amazons and the Athenian women, who seek the Altar of *Clementia* (*Theb.* 12.481-6). Moss (2020) 296-314 makes persuasive links between Hippolyte and Hypsipyle, and underscores the elegiac undertones of *militia amoris* in the former's presentation.

<sup>40</sup> See Heslin (2005) 237 on the irony here, as the virgin-goddess *par excellence* does not manage to preserve the virginity of two "girls" there. The observance of rites to Pallas Minerva "of the beach" emphasises the concept of liminality, fundamental in the *Achilleid*. For links between the Amazons and Athena, see Blok (1995) 156-7; 259.



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<sup>41</sup> For the parallelism, see Murgatroyd (2009) 290 and Sharrock (2015) 174. Augoustakis (2010) 242-5 highlights the Flavian iconographic tendency to gravitate towards *virginitas* and *pudicitia*, with Minerva and the Amazons as main figures. On the Cancelleria marble reliefs, which (might) show the goddess Roma dressed like an Amazon with bare chest and Minerva as Domitian's patron goddess, see Augoustakis (2010) 244-5.

<sup>42</sup> Keith (2013) 295, see also Guy-Bray (2006) 9, and Sharrock (2015) 171-2: this is not a simple maternity leave, but the beginning of her permanent condition. Augoustakis (2010) 79 examines the negative aspects of *blandus*, while Moss (2020) 302-3 its elegiac tinge. See Braund (1996) 12-13, Fucecchi (2007) 11-13 and Augoustakis (2010) 79-80, who argues that Hippolyte's domestication places her in a liminal position, as a barbarian outsider *and* as assimilated Athenian. Newlands (2016) 170-2 adds to the sinister element by reminding the reader of the child born by the union of Theseus and Hippolyte as the one who will continue to spread "the curse of Theban marriage" via the incest of Hippolytus and Phaedra, events that Pollmann argues (2004) 217 amplify for the audience the "unbreakable" tragic chain of Theban evils. The Amazons who married Scythians (resulting in the Sauromatae, Hdt. 4.118-19) were not allowed to marry until a man of the enemy was killed: Hippolyte here enacts a complete reversal of traditional Amazonian customs.

<sup>43</sup> On the essentiality here of *cultus* and Ovidian simulations, see Bessone (2016) 187-90. The "taming" of Achilles, with particular emphasis on his hair, will be symbolically undone in the lion simile (*Ach.* 1.858-63).

<sup>44</sup> Which the hero is clearly disregarding (*Ach.* 1.765-6).

<sup>45</sup> For the gaze and this new Achilles, see Bessone (2016) 199; (2018) 189 and (2020a) 100.

<sup>46</sup> I thank Alison Sharrock for this suggestion. For the parallel of Penthesilea and Ascanius in *Aeneid* 10, see Rogerson (2017) 141. The phrasing also recalls Thetis' veiling of Achilles (*Ach.* 1.346: *mater et ipsa umeros exsertaque brachia velat*), reinforcing the idea of Deidamia as a second Thetis.

<sup>47</sup> Reed (2007) 33.

<sup>48</sup> See Lowenstam (1993) 37-49 for a breakdown of the images, and Kirichenko (2013) for their link to other *ekphraseis* in the *Aeneid*. Putnam (1998) 263 stresses that "Aeneas takes the place of Achilles in the post-ekphrasis narrative". Statius instead casts Achilles in the bellicose, albeit passive, role.

<sup>49</sup> The first mention of the retrieval of the belt in Athenian literature is found in Euripides, as Blok (1995) 350 argues, cf. Eur. *HF* 408-17. The play between ζωστήρ and ζώνη opens up the complex issue of the erotic level in story Hercules and Hippolyte, on which see Schauenburg (1960) 1-13 and Blok (1995) 424. ζώνη is also linked to another later etymology, as *-zoonais* preceded by the prefix *ama-* means "with girdles", cf. Blok (1995) 23-4.

<sup>50</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.29.

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<sup>51</sup> See Blok (1995) 349-51. The absence of any mention of this particular *furtum* of the belt in the *Thebaid* might come as a remarkable omission, as not only Statius was familiar with the myth (*Theb.* 6. 311), but in some later accounts, Hippolyte's marriage with the Athenian hero is actually a recompense for his agency in aiding Hercules in this particular labour (Lycoph. *Alex.* 1329-31, with Hornblower [2015] 466). It could well be in the backdrop of the *Thebaid's* narrative. For Statius' reworking of various strands of the Hippolyte/Antiope myth here, see Pollmann (2004) 217, and for an overview of contrasting sources on Hercules' 9<sup>th</sup> labour and Theseus, see Gantz (1993) 282-5; 397-400. Blok (1995) 350: "the motif of the girdle eventually came to replace Herakles' Amazonomachy to some extent". We might detect a faint echo of the *zoster* myth in the line *corytique leues portantur et ignea gemmis / cingula*, and in the *Aeneid* passage (*aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae*).

<sup>52</sup> A detail that brings Camilla into view, and what she is unconventionally *not* wearing (*Aen.* 11.576: *pro crinali auro*; "in place of golden clasp"), but also to an Indian, non-Roman atmosphere, as Athis, the *puer delicatus* slain by Perseus, is similarly described (*Met.* 5.53: *et madidos murra curvum crinale capillos*; "and a hairband held his locks, soaked in myrrh, in place"). Cf. Bernstein (2008) 121 for Achilles and Camilla, and (2016) for the Amazonian Camilla in Virgil (*Aen.* 11.649) and Claudian.

<sup>53</sup> But one that may not actually have happened as they wanted: again, Achilles never tears off his own clothes (*Ach.* 1.887): he has not managed a *straightforward* scission.

<sup>54</sup> There could be a "domestic" link between Hercules' labour and Achilles' family: some sources include Peleus among the participants in the retrieval of the belt, cf. schol. Eur. *Andr.* 796 (= Pind. fr.172.3-5: πρώτον μὲν Ἀλκμήνας σὺν υἱῷ / Τρώϊον ἄμ πεδίον / καὶ μετὰ ζῶστῆρας Ἀμαζόνος ἦλθεν; "At first, he went to Troy with the son of Alcmena and then to the recovery of the belt of the Amazon").

<sup>55</sup> For Achilles as mirroring Deidamia and vice versa, see again Sturt (1982) 838.

<sup>56</sup> On the wealth of interpretations of the Homeric formula, ultimately laying bare the Amazons' liminal status, see Blok (1995) 155-85.

<sup>57</sup> Motherhood turns Deidamia into a second Thetis. On the rape, see Davis (2006) 133-7. On Argia, see Newlands (2016) 171, Agri (2014) 747. The comparison with Agri's formulation of a Flavian engendered *pudor* might also be fruitful if we again consider Deidamia's loss of virginity, albeit momentarily regained via the Amazon simile, thus aligning her to the women who become heroines *only* after the abandonment of her virginal status. Her "snatched *pudor*" is made explicit after the rape (*Ach.* 1.671: *raptumque pudorem*). In her description before the simile (*Ach.* 1.757-8), it is her companions who are described as *pudicas*, not her (nor clearly Achilles, *pace* Sturt [1982] 838 and Heslin [2005] 152 who do read *pudicas* as an ironic reference). The *natas* could perhaps just

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identify Achilles and Deidamia, and the *comites pudicas* are the rest of the daughters, indeed still chaste (also called “companions” at *Ach.* 1.584 and 1.606). Achilles makes a point about calling the Greeks *comites* at *Ach.* 2.166. Deidamia appears *pudibunda* after her marriage and in front of her father (*Ach.* 1.918). On Argia, see Bessone (2015) and Manioti (2016).

<sup>58</sup> See n.30. Heslin (2005) 139 calls it a “whimsical” proposal, but directs us towards the underlying “arbitrariness” of gender roles. There are faint, more desperate echoes to Argia’s plea to her dead husband (*Theb.* 12.326: *age, moenibus induc*; “come now, lead me into the city”). The anonymous reader also brings to my attention the figure of Marcia in Lucan, and her plea to Cato (*Luc. BC.* 2.348: *da mihi castra sequi: cur tuta in pace relinquar?*).

<sup>59</sup> On Deidamia’s agency and her violent transformation into a woman, see Rimell (2015) 268-9.

<sup>60</sup> On Theseus as a rapist, see Hershkowitz (1994) 145-6. On the gender of *erectum* as exposing Achilles, see Kozák (2020) 327-9.

<sup>61</sup> Fucecchi (2007) 13.

<sup>62</sup> See Nuzzo (2012) 141 for other examples of this *iunctura*. Similarly, *Theb.* 3.377 (*obliquo lumine*) exemplifies the words of Polynices as he imagines hypothetical disapproving mothers if he were not to proceed against Thebes.

<sup>63</sup> Augoustakis (2010) 80; Pollmann (2004) 245 for a “de-Amazoned Amazon queen”. Hershkowitz (1998a) 297 discusses Hippolyte’s expectations. Her weapons become a sort of *spolia opima*, of the defeated queen herself to Theseus Feretrius.

<sup>64</sup> Keith (2000) 99. Bessone (2018) 186-7.

<sup>65</sup> Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 254 talk of Lycomedes’ court as “exotic”, and of a possible “*légère coloration féministe*” intended here. Rimell (2015) 259 instead sees the *about-to-erupt* potential as a dominant theme in the poem, and similarly, Newlands (2016) 170-1 advances more pessimistic reflections of Hippolyte.

<sup>66</sup> Connection noted by Bettenworth (2004) 65 n.132.

<sup>67</sup> On this, see Sharrock (2019) 300-9, especially 307. Ovid in *Met.* 7 imposes two delays on the primary plot that allow for secondary but dominant narratives to arise, those of the plague at Aegina (*Met.* 501-613), the origin of the Myrmidons (*Met.* 7.614-657) and the Cephalus and Procris love story (*Met.* 7.670-872). Cephalus is recognised by Aeacus and his sons (*Met.* 7.494-7) and Lycomedes’ abrupt interruption of Ulysses’ speech (*Ach.* 1.737, cf. n. 9) could signify that the old Scyrian king already, in a way, knows these warriors (e.g., Ulysses’ emphasis on a well-known war, *Ach.* 1.728-9). The locution *medio sermone*, indicating an aposiopesis, occurs when a divinity is seen *leaving* mid-speech (*Aen.* 4.276-7; 4.388-9; 9.656-7; similarly, *Val. Fl.* 6.679). A closer

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parallel is Silius (*Pun.* 13.661) where Scipio, addressing his father's ghost, cannot even finish his speech before being interrupted.

<sup>68</sup> Both love-stories (Cephalus + Procris/Achilles + Deidamia) feature weapons as conversation starters; for the former, the spear that Cephalus receives by Procris, and for the latter, the weapons that Ulysses brings as gifts.

<sup>69</sup> Ulysses' lie betrays some truth: Scyros hosts a base of the Hellenic Air Force because of its exceptional location in the Aegean.

<sup>70</sup> For Deidamia as an Ovidian *relicta*, see Rosati (1992) 256-63.

<sup>71</sup> For Valerius Flaccus and the *Achilleid*, see Kozák (2013) and Parkes (2014). For Apollonian parallels, see Wijsman (1996) 58 (cf. *Argon.* 2.920); Hershkowitz (1998b) 206 n.58 (cf. *Argon.* 2.912-14). Here, Valerius draws closely from Apollonius (*Argon.* 2.955-7).

<sup>72</sup> Valerius expands from the Apollonian account, where there is no interaction between Achilles and the heroes, only with Peleus (*Argon.* 1.557-8). See Kozák (2013) 257-8 for this Valerian intertext at *Ach.* 1.146-8.

<sup>73</sup> Dilke (1954) 133.

<sup>74</sup> Thus in structural harmony with Parkes (2009), who configures the *Achilleid* as a sequel to the *Argonautica*.

<sup>75</sup> Dilke (1954) 132.

<sup>76</sup> *Argon.* 2.966-9, with Hershkowitz (1998b) 206.

<sup>77</sup> See Murgatroyd (2009) 287-8 for Valerius' dramatic expansion of Apollonius (*Argon.* 2.370-4), and the Amazons' fiercer portrayal.

<sup>78</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b) 204-6 on Valerius' innovation from Apollonius (*Argon.* 2.985-6 and 993-5). In Valerius, the last of the Amazonian exploits is the retrieval of Hippolyte's belt (*insignis quo balteus arserit auro*), a very Ovidian denomination, cf. *Met.* 9.189: *Thermodontiaco caelatus balteus auro*; "the belt engraved with gold from the river Thermodon", reminiscent of Penthesilea too (*Aen.* 1.491-2: *ardet / aurea...cingula*). See Wijsman (1996) 85-7: though unnamed, Hippolyte' tale ought to be supplied. Neronian versions of the myth see both the aggressive side of Hercules (*Sen. Ag.* 848-50: *vidit Hippolyte ferox / pectore e medio rapi / spoliium*; "from the middle of her breast fierce Hippolyte watched him as he snatched the spoils"), and its more erotic aspect (*Her. Fur.* 533-46), cf. Fitch (1987) 261.

<sup>79</sup> To paraphrase duBois (1982) 70.