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ACHILLEAE COMAE: HAIR AND HEROISM ACCORDING TO DOMITIAN[1]

For a homicidal tyrant Domitian was disconcertingly droll. A number of examples of his 'sardonic wit' survive.[2] One of them was so good that Marcus Aurelius supposedly repeated it, and attributed it to Hadrian rather than Domitian on the grounds that good sayings had no moral force if they came from tyrants.[3] Domitian also possessed a talent for writing. Suetonius (*Dom.* 2.2, 20) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 4.86.2) claim that his interest in literature was merely a pretence, but Domitian's contemporaries claim for him genuine ability, and here for once they seem much closer to the mark, as Coleman argues.[4]

Our direct knowledge of Domitian's writings is limited. Ironically we owe the only surviving fragment, besides official documents, to his detractor Suetonius, but Suetonius had his reasons for mentioning it. At *Dom.* 18 he describes Domitian's appearance, concluding with his lack of head hair: he was so sensitive about his baldness, according to Suetonius, that if anybody else was made the butt of humour or abuse on this score he took it as a personal insult.

This claim would seem to be contradicted by the next piece of information Suetonius gives:

> quamuis libello quem de cura capillorum ad amicum edidit haec etiam, simul illum seque consolans, inseruerit:
>
> 'οὐχ ὁράᾳς, οἷος κἀγὼ καλός τε μέγας τε;
>
> eadem me tamen manent capillorum fata, et forti animo fero comam in adulescentia senescentem. scias nec gratius quicquam decore nec breuius.'

We have a paradox: an emperor who was paranoid about being bald, yet also wrote literature on the subject. But it of course suits Suetonius' broader purposes to mention such an *infra dig.* departure by the *princeps* into literary trivia.[5]

As an indication of Domitian's abilities this passage is at first glance not much to go on. Bardon, however, attempts a critique, and is not very appreciative of it. He recognizes the irony of *fata capillorum* and mock-heroic quality of *forti animo*, but nevertheless censures *in adulescentia senescentem* as 'précieuse', *scias . . . breuius* as 'heurtée et rauque' and the passage as a whole as 'd'un maniérisme poussé au

[1] Thanks are due to Stephen Heyworth, William Lavelle, Peter Heslin, Andrew Erskine, and *CQ*'s anonymous referee for their insightful criticism.

[2] K. M. Coleman, 'The Emperor Domitian and literature', *ANRW* II.32.5, 3087–115 (on which these first paragraphs are closely based), esp. 3091–2, 3094–5. Suetonius (*Dom.* 20) grudgingly concedes that Domitian was *dictorum interdum etiam notabilium.*

[3] *Condicio principum miserrima, quibus de coniuratione comperta non crederetur nisi occisis*: see Coleman, art. cit., 3092, n. 22; Suet. *Dom.* 21; S.H.A. *Avid. Cass.* 2.5–6. All this *pace* B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London, 1992), according to whom Domitian was 'completely lacking a sense of humour' (198).

[4] Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91; Pliny, *H.N.* Praef. 5; Stat. *Ach.* 1.16–17; Val. Flac. 1.7–20; Coleman, art. cit., 3088–91.

[5] For Suetonius' 'concealed' invective see T. Barton, 'The *inventio* of Nero: Suetonius', in J. Elsner and J. Masters (edd.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation* (London, 1994), 48–63.

ridicule'.[6] One suspects Bardon is really judging the man, not the prose style. If the *libellus de cura capillorum* was indeed a *ludus*—and this is his own suggestion—then Bardon is clearly missing the point: it was *meant* to be amusing. That at any rate is the assumption of this note. There is a further dimension of sophistication and wit to this fragment of Domitian, I shall suggest, which has as yet gone unappreciated; one that will corroborate ancient testimony as to Domitian's literary talent.

The first point to be emphasized is that the passage—which was apparently an aside (*haec etiam . . . inseruerit*) in the work as a whole—is a (parody of a) *consolatio* (*simul illum seque consolans*): Domitian offers consolation for his and his friend's receding hair. This explains one feature in particular of the passage. It begins with a Homeric quotation, *Il.* 21.108, and *eadem me tamen manent capillorum fata* is a humorous paraphrase of *Il.* 21.110:

ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή.

These Homeric lines derive from the famous speech of Achilles to Lycaon. Achilles consoles Lycaon for his imminent death (at Achilles' hands) with the observation that he (Achilles) and Patroclus too, for all their prowess, were doomed to die (106–13):

ἀλλά, φίλος, θάνε καὶ σύ· τί ἦ ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;
κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὅ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.
οὐχ ὁράᾳς, οἷος καὶ ἐγὼ καλός τε μέγας τε;
πατρὸς δ' εἰμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ·
ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή.
ἔσσεται ἢ ἠὼς ἢ δείλη ἢ μέσον ἦμαρ,
ὁππότε τις καὶ ἐμεῖο Ἄρηϊ ἐκ θυμὸν ἕληται,
ἢ ὅ γε δουρὶ βαλὼν ἢ ἀπὸ νευρῆφιν οἰστῷ.

This was a very apposite passage for Domitian to cite. In this spoof consolation for hair loss Domitian employs a very familiar consolatory *topos*. It was a commonplace of consolatory literature that death was a fate common to all: even 'heroes and the sons of gods' could not escape it. Lattimore goes so far as to call this 'the consolation *par excellence*'.[7] Very frequently the superlative (but no less mortal) individual cited in such contexts was the ὠκύμορος Achilles: his death was all the more poignant since he (rather like Domitian's hair) died *in adulescentia*.[8] Furthermore Mallet and Lier trace the theme back to this very locus (itself a *consolatio*) in *Iliad* 21, together with a similar one at 18.117–19 where Achilles, addressing Thetis, compares his own mortality with Heracles'. The speech of Achilles to Lycaon quoted by Domitian might thus be considered the *Ur-consolatio*.[9]

Its status is reflected in Roman literature. At *Carm.* 1.28.7 (*occidit et Pelopis genitor . . .*), for example, in a passage indebted to consolatory literature,[10] Horace

[6] H. Bardon, *Les Empereurs et les lettres latines d'Auguste à Hadrien* (Paris, 1940), 281.

[7] Men. Rhet. 414.4ff.; R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes Book 1* (Oxford, 1970), ad 1.28.7; R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, 1962), 250–1.

[8] *RE* s.v. 'Consolatio ad Liviam', 939.48ff. B. Lier, 'Topica carminum sepulcralium latinorum', *Philologus* 62 (1903), 445–77, 563–603, 576f.; Lattimore, op. cit., 254. See, for example, Ov. *Am.* 3.9.1; Prop. 3.18.27; W. Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften I* (Berlin, 1955), 1804.10.

[9] F. Mallet, *Quaestiones Propertianae* (Diss. Göttingen, 1882), 65; Lier, art. cit., 576, n. 23. Compare N. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary, vol. VI (books 21–24)* (Cambridge, 1993) ad 21.106–7.

[10] See Nisbet and Hubbard, loc. cit.; H. J. Botschuyver, *Scholia in Horatium λφψ* (Amsterdam, 1935), 61: 'OCCIDIT ET] Haec ad consolationem mortuorum inculcat'; Porphyrio ad loc.: 'haec autem ad solacium mortis dicuntur'.

alludes to *Il.* 21.107:

κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὅ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.[11]

We could also compare Ov. *Am.* 3.9.21:

quid pater Ismario, quid mater profuit Orpheo?

with *Il.* 21.109. But the best known allusion to Achilles' speech is in the third book of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. At 1024ff., as part of the consolation for death which is a focal element of the book,[12] Lucretius reminds the reader that even the greatest men of the past died (1025–6):

lumina sis oculis etiam bonus Ancu' reliquit,
qui melior multis quam tu fuit, improbe, rebus.

Line 1025 is a near-quotation from Ennius (*Ann.* 137 Sk.), but 1026 is modelled on the second half of *Il.* 21.107 just as 1042f. (*ipse Epicurus obit . . . /qui*) is modelled on the first half, and l. 1045,

tu uero dubitabis et indignabere obire?

strongly recalls *Il.* 21.106.[13]

So in short, when Domitian introduces his mock *consolatio* he does so by means of a conventional—arguably even trite[14]—*exemplum*: Achilles' assertion of his own (and Patroclus') mortality in *Iliad* 21. Domitian's quotation is thus apposite to a *consolatio*, but what entitles it to be called witty (besides the bathetic effect of employing a high epic *topos* in such a flippant context) is that it is particularly apposite to the specific type of consolation Domitian is offering here. There was a strong association between Achilles and (early) death, but there was also, as I shall now suggest, a strong association between Achilles and *hair*.

Roscher cites evidence for the iconography of Achilles:[15] the material reveals a preoccupation with his hair. At *Descriptiones* 3, Libanius describes a depiction of Achilles in which he is καλὸς τὴν κόμην. At Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 2.35 Theagenes is likened to Achilles: he has Ἀχίλλειόν τι τῷ ὄντι. Much is made of his hair: he had his hair (roughly translated) 'thrown up straight in a mane from his forehead', ἀπὸ τοῦ μετώπου τὴν κόμην πρὸς τὸ ὄρθιον ἀναχαιτίζων.[16] Maillon compares Heliodorus' description of Theagenes with depictions of Achilles by Philostratus.[17] At *Imagines* 2.7.4, for example, Philostratus provides perhaps the best evidence that Achilles, as conventionally represented, had a very full head of hair. As it happens, in the picture Philostratus describes here Achilles has no hair at all, but it is the exception which proves the rule:

[11] Nisbet and Hubbard, op. cit., ad 1.28.8. Compare also *me quoque* (21) and *Il.* 21.110.

[12] E. J. Kenney, *Lucretius, De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge, 1971), 31–4.

[13] R. Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus, De Rerum Natura Buch III* (Leipzig & Berlin, 1897), ad 1026; Kenney, op. cit., ad locc.

[14] The rest of the passage also consists of commonplaces. On *nec gratius quicquam decore nec breuius*, for example, see G. W. Mooney, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli de Vita Caesarum Libri VII–VIII* (Dublin, 1930), 595.

[15] W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884–1937), vol. 1, 63.

[16] Compare Plaut. *Mil. Glor.* 61–4.

[17] J. Maillon, *Héliodore, Les Éthiopiques* , vol. 1 (Paris, 1935), 95.

τὸν Ἀχιλλέα μὴ ἀπὸ τῆς κόμης· οἴχεται γὰρ ταῦτο αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸν Πάτροκλον ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶδος αὐτὸν ἐνδεικνύτω καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ κομᾶν.

On *this* occasion, Philostratus says, we cannot identify Achilles by his hair; the implication is that as a rule hair is the most reliable *Kennzeichen* of the hero. There is further evidence in Synesius' *Praise of Baldness*—a response to Dio of Prusa's *Praise of Hair*. Achilles is very visible in this text, and that in itself is strong evidence of his association with hair. Synesius also indicates that Achilles was considered to have been κομήτης (17–18); though (in support of his position that baldness is a desirable state) he proceeds to suggest that, since Athena had to stand behind him to grasp his hair (*Il.* 1.197), he may already have been balding at the front.

These texts are datable to the third and fourth centuries. Another piece of evidence dates from closer to Domitian's own time. Martial 12.82 describes the sycophantic behaviour of a man at the baths who is angling for a dinner invitation. Menogenes makes sure you win the ball-games, he insists on retrieving the ball from the dirt even after he has washed and dressed, he praises the whiter-than-white quality of your filthy towels, and though you are practically bald he will compliment you on your luxurious hair (9–10):

> exiguos secto comentem dente capillos
> dicet Achilleas disposuisse comas.

Post attempts various explanations of this conceit. Martial may be thinking of Achilles' spell at the court of Lycomedes on Scyros, where he impersonated a (long-haired) woman (compare Mart. 5.48.5–6). Alternatively Achilles here stands synecdochically for Homeric heroes in general (who often have ξανθὴ κόμη) or for the κάρη κομόωντες Achaeans.[18] There was probably no single source for the notion, but what I suspect was an important one, not considered by Post, is suggested by the passage of Philostratus cited above. At *Il.* 23.140ff. Achilles cuts off his hair as a token of grief for Patroclus. He has been growing it τηλεθόωσα for the river Spercheus:

> ἔνθ' αὖτ' ἄλλ' ἐνόησε ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς·
> στὰς ἀπάνευθε πυρῆς ξανθὴν ἀπεκείρατο χαίτην,
> τήν ῥα Σπερχειῷ ποταμῷ τρέφε τηλεθόωσαν·

This episode is referred to by Statius in his poem about the dedication of the hair of Earinus, Domitian's favourite. His hair will outdo famous mythological examples of hair such as the purple lock of Nisus and the hair:

> quam Sperchio tumidus seruabat Achilles.[19]

But whatever the various sources of the idea Achilles apparently came to be represented as long-haired at every stage of his life. Another useful contemporary source for Achilles' appearance is Statius' epic *Achilleid*. Much emphasis is placed on his hair, before and after his arrival on Scyros. The description at *Ach.* 1.162, *fuluoque nitet coma gratior auro*, is, as Kürschner notes, strongly reminiscent of Philostratus, *Heroic.* 19.5.[20] If we turn to the plastic arts, a fine parallel to all this theoretical discussion of Achilles' appearance might be the bushy-haired Achilles of the

[18] E. Post, *Selected Epigrams of Martial* (Norman, OK, 1967), ad loc.

[19] Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.85 (compare *Ach.* 1.628–9). On this poem see below, n. 35.

[20] H. Kürschner, *P. Papinius Statius quibus in Achilleide componenda usus esse videatur fontibus* (Diss. Marburg, 1907), 39, n. 5; O. A. W. Dilke, *Statius: Achilleid* (Cambridge, 1954), ad 1.162. For further references to his hair in the *Achilleid* see 1.328, 855f.

anonymous Hellenistic *Achilles and Penthesilea* sculptural group, which, though lost, can be partially reconstructed from fragmentary copies:[21] it was of course subsequent to the events described in the *Iliad* that Penthesilea came to Troy and met Achilles.

There we might leave it, Domitian's literary talent vindicated: the tiny fragment of his work which survives embodies a classic instance of (technically speaking) 'defamiliarization': the revivification of a tired consolatory trope. Achilles, the exemplar of doomed prowess in general, does double duty in this work about (doomed) hair. But we may yet rescue Domitian's *libellus* (and this note) from utter inconsequentiality: the insight it offers into the iconography of Achilles may have further applications. Someone who modelled himself closely on Achilles was Alexander the Great.[22] His imitation of the hero even extended to his personal appearance: certain physical features of Alexander's portraits can be shown to be influenced by the iconography of Achilles, as Stewart shows. In this connection, it is a telling fact that a copy of the head of Achilles from the Penthesilea group (now in Madrid) was for a long time assumed to be Alexander.[23] Two possible grounds for the misidentification immediately spring to mind: the upward tilt of Achilles' head, and Achilles' thick hair.[24] Stewart traces Alexander's full hairstyle to his status as the lion-like (λεοντώδης) man of physiognomical theory. The lion-man was in fact a type, Stewart proposes, of which Achilles was the archetype, and this may suggest another source for the Achillean χαίτη.[25] Alexander's hair must also owe something to divine iconography.[26] But was another significant influence on the 'long mane of hair . . . characteristic of images of the "heroic Alexander"'[27] the greatest hero of them all, Achilles?

If so, it would be highly ironic in the context of Domitianic portraiture. For though in reality balding, in his portraits Domitian 'always appears with a good head of hair'.[28] Strong cites as an explanation the 'usual ancient aversion to balding' encouraged by physiognomical theory, but also a return by Domitian to a form of portraiture, favoured by Nero, which was influenced by Hellenistic ruler-cult.[29] Breckenridge talks of Domitian's 'evocation of Alexander the Great's divinizing image' towards the end of his reign, his hair 'swept up from his forehead in the tell-tale Neronian fashion, the hallmark of fascination with the mirage of Alexander's fabled power'.[30]

[21] On this see E. Berger, 'Der Neue Amazonenkopf im basler Antikenmuseum—ein Beitrag zur hellenistischen Achill-Penthesileagruppe', in M. Rohde-Liegle, H. A. Cahn & H. Chr. Ackermann (edd.), *Gestalt und Geschichte: Festschrift Karl Schefold* (Bern, 1967), 61–75. For the head of Achilles see pls. 26–8. For a reconstruction of the sculpture see *LIMC* 1.2 s.v. 'Achilleus', no. 746.

[22] A. Stewart, *Faces of Power. Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (California, 1993), 78–86.

[23] Berger, art. cit., 70.

[24] See R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford, 1988), 47, 111.

[25] Stewart, op. cit., 76–8.

[26] Smith, op. cit., 47. In particular, Apollo and Bacchus: for their long hair see F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg, 1969), ad *Met.* 3.421.

[27] J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic age* (Cambridge, 1986), 21.

[28] D. E. Strong, *Roman Art* (London², 1988), 137.

[29] Ibid., 135f.

[30] J. D. Breckenridge, 'Roman Imperial Portraiture from Augustus to Gallienus', *ANRW* II.12.2, 477–512, 495; G. Daltrop, U. Hausmann and M. Wegner, *Die Flavier. Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Julia Titi, Domitilla, Domitia, Das römische Herrscherbild* II.1 (Berlin, 1966), pls. 24, 25. Compare Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.84–7, which asserts the superiority of the equestrian statue of Domitian as Hercules in the forum over a statue of Alexander by Lysippus. For comparison of Domitian with Alexander see further K. M. Coleman, *Statius, Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), ad 4.1.40–1.

All in all the evidence suggests an emperor preoccupied by his baldness. Others shared this anxiety,[31] and we can appreciate why a question of personal vanity such as hair, or the lack of it, might be amplified into a matter of political strategy: it was not simply vanity that, for example, made Julius Caesar wear an olive-wreath to conceal his receding hairline, but also a sense that an individual's great achievements should be reflected in his outward appearance.[32] Domitian's *libellus de cura capillorum* was probably a relatively early work.[33] In his portraits, by contrast, particularly the later ones, baldness was something to be disguised, not discussed. In the heroic idiom of the dedication to Statius' *Thebaid*, similarly, Domitian is provided with hair (1.28f.). Earlier I suggested that Suetonius was presenting something of a paradox: Domitian had a persecution complex about his baldness, yet wrote humorously on the subject.[34] But is this really a paradox? Hair preoccupied this emperor. He composed literature on baldness; he displayed paranoia about it; he cultivated an image which actively emphasized the hair he did not possess. His fixation (as it is fair to call it) manifested itself in more ways than one.[35] Wit—a work on hair-care written by a bald man—was one outlet. But the witticism by Domitian cited at the beginning of this note (Suet. *Dom.* 21) illustrates the potentially very close relationship between jocularity and profound anxiety. Being *princeps* brought enormous psychological pressures, and exaggerated minor quirks. In an emperor rendered progressively *metu saeuus* (Suet. *Dom.* 3.2), 'paranoid' (in modern terms), it was a short step from cracking witticisms about his lack of hair to believing, as Suetonius tells us he did, that *all* jokes about baldness were at his personal expense.

University College Dublin LLEWELYN MORGAN

[31] Caligula, for example (Suet. *Cal.* 35.2, 50.1). The toupee worn by Otho (Suet. *Otho* 12.1), who also seemingly cultivated an Alexandrian image, is visible in his coin-portraits: Breckenridge, art. cit., 491–2.

[32] Suet. *Jul.* 45.2; Dio 43.43.1. See S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford, 1971), 23–6. Caesar's anxiety about his hair must in part have been because he was another aspirant Alexander (Suet. *Jul.* 7): compare Strong, op. cit. (n. 27), 77 and Breckenridge, art. cit., 479f. on imitation of Alexander in the portraiture of Pompey the Great, and possibly also Sulla. But a lack of hair was of course a particular handicap to a Caesar: see Weinstock, loc. cit., on the etymology of *Caesar* from *caesaries*.

[33] Bardon, loc. cit. (n. 5); Coleman, art. cit. (n. 1), 3088, n. 5, 3090, 3095.

[34] The many poems of Martial which satirize baldness (e.g. 6.12, 6.57, 10.83) might imply a continued readiness on the emperor's part to be amused by the subject. Epigram 5.49, in particular, is from a book dedicated to Domitian which apparently goes to some lengths not to upset the emperor: see P. Howell, *Martial: Epigrams V* (Warminster, 1995), 3–5.

[35] Compare, for example, the extraordinary series of poems by Statius (*Silv.* 3.4) and Martial (9.16, 17, 36) commemorating the dedication of his lover Earinus' hair to Asclepius at Pergamum. In Statius' poem Earinus' dedication of his long hair, a token of his youthfulness, in order to secure 'lasting youth' not for himself but for Domitian (*Silv.* 3.4.101), rather suggests that Earinus here substitutes for Domitian, and his copious hair for the hair Domitian lacked. The themes of the poem—Earinus' youth, beauty and hair—correspond strikingly to important themes in the representation of the emperor himself, further complicating any attempt clearly to distinguish Earinus and Domitian. For Domitian's youthfulness see, for example, *Silv.* 4.1.46f., 4.3.148f. (compare Mart. 4.1.3–4). Reference is often made to Domitian's role in the conflict with Vitellius at Rome (69 A.D.), at the early age of eighteen: see Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.79–81, 5.3.195ff.; *Theb.* 1.21–4; Mart. 9.101.14; Joseph. *BJ* 7.85; Tac. *Hist.* 3.74 (compare Mart. 2.2.4; Sil. *Pun.* 3.608). For Domitian's beauty see *Silv.* 3.4.44f., 4.2.38–56; Mart. 9.65. On this poem and the awkwardness of its theme see D. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973), 28–36.