

Sources & Parallels in the *Byzantine Achilleid*

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Abstract

The *Byzantine Achilleid* is an anonymous romance of many qualities which has been overshadowed in comparison to other Palaeologan romances. The *Achilleid* survives in three manuscripts, the London, Naples, and Oxford. Each of them transmits a different version of the romance and is independent from another. Particular attention is given to the London version, which formed part of my doctoral thesis as the two editions of the London version of the *Achilleid*, both published in 1919 by D.C. Hesseling and by Benedikt Haag are incomplete.

As shall be illustrated, the three versions of the *Achilleid* go back to a common ancestor, the *ur-Achilleid*. In the present paper, oral tradition is examined in an attempt to trace parallels between texts and to create a better understanding of the circumstances of textual composition. The chronological framework of the *Achilleid* emerges even more by locating common elements between the Palaeologan romances and the *Achilleid*, and particularly with its model source, *Digenis*. As shall be argued in terms of textual witnesses, the original *Achilleid* may appear to be as early as the thirteenth century. However, any attempt to establish an accurate textual dependency may suffer as there are still many unanswered questions regarding the specific sociocultural background of textual transmission.

Keywords: Achilleid, sources, oral tradition, Palaeologan

The *Byzantine Achilleid* is an anonymous romance of many literary, linguistic and metrical qualities which has not been the subject of a complete philological analysis, but has been overshadowed in comparison to other Palaeologan romances. The *Achilleid* survives in three manuscripts, the London, Naples and Oxford. Each of them transmits a different version of the romance and is independent from another. Despite a large number of common elements and of the same storyline, L, N and O differ so much that the archetype, or even the hyparchetype α , cannot be reconstructed. Each of these versions should be regarded and studied as independent literary creations. The present paper shall focus on possible sources and parallels in order to create a chronological framework, in which the original *Achilleid* can be placed. This survey makes no attempt at completeness but it is intended to provide the reader with a better understanding of the text's background.

Digenis Akritas has generally been identified as the model source of the *Achilleid*¹. One of the first scholars to observe the close relation between the *Digenis* and the *Achilleid* was the great Krumbacher who pointed out that, despite the 'Homeric' subject, the *Achilleid* was not indebted to 'Trojan material' (as Sathas still thought)² but had more in common with the *Digenis* and other romances: «Nach seinem inneren Gehalte ist das Werk trotz der homerischen Namen mit dem Akritenzyklus und den Märchenromanen enger verwandt als mit dem Trojageschichten».³ He was followed by Wartenberg who offered an in-depth analysis of the many similarities indicating a strong textual dependence between the two texts.⁴ The undeniable influence of *Digenis* on the *Achilleid* has also been thoroughly discussed by Mitsakis⁵ and Lassithiotakis⁶.

Mitsakis provides a detailed discussion focusing mainly on the Naples version of the *Achilleid* and the Escorial, Grottaferrata and Trebizond versions of the *Digenis Akritas*.⁷ Striking parallels can be observed in terms of the main narrative elements that are presented not only in a similar sequence, but also in similar wording. In both texts we are told of two royal couples with an only child, who is gifted with extraordinary beauty and remarkable physical abilities. Both Digenis at the age of twelve and Achilles around the age of thirteen, exhibit exceptional fighting skills and bravery either in hunting (Digenis) or in a tournament

¹ See Trapp 1971.

² See Sathas 1879.

³ Krumbacher 1897, 848-49.

⁴ Wartenberg 1900, 194-97.

⁵ Mitsakis 1963, 50-68. Mitsakis stated as another common point between the *Achilleid* and *Digenis* that the name of the female protagonists is not mentioned in both texts. In the Naples version, v. L 1352, the girl bears the name Polyxene; but this is a later interpolation.

⁶ Lassithiotakis 2001, 373-92.

⁷ Holton 1974.

(Achilles). They fall in love, serenade their love interests and subsequently abduct them willingly, while provoking the relatives of the female protagonists with their arrogant words. Both pairs of protagonists eventually wed and lead a brief life of happiness until their death. The verses on the inevitability of death and the vainness of man's existence are so alike between the two texts (N 1908-1917 vs. G, VIII 15/E 1695-1697/T 2986 and G, VIII 268-276, T 3130-3132) that Wartenberg considered the verses of the *Achilleid* to be an adaptation of the corresponding verses in *Digenis*.⁸

Arguably the strongest indication that the *Digenis* served as the model of the *Achilleid* is the tragic end of the eponymous heroes and their loved ones. All other romances (with the exception of the *Tale of Troy*) have a happy end: the *Digenis* and the *Achilleid* do not. Both texts present the biography of their hero from cradle to grave: love is of course the main theme of both the *Digenis* and the *Achilleid*, but it is as if their poets are saying that there is more to life than just love. In both texts there is an attempt to narrate the whole story from beginning to end, and in this respect they are closer to biographies, such as the famous *Alexander Romance*⁹, than to the other romances.¹⁰

There are many remarkable parallels between the *Digenis* and the *Achilleid*. One example involves the scene in which young Achilles after his victory at his first tournament refuses the crown offered by his father the king. Instead he asks for twelve horses and men and expresses his desire for his father and mother not to be disturbed by worries of war as he wishes to assume responsibilities of this sort:

ὄτι ἀπὸ σήμερον νὰ ζῆς καὶ ἔννοϊαν νὰ μηδὲν ἔχῃς
καὶ νὰ μηδὲν ἔχῃς ὄχλησιν ἢ ταραχὴν πολέμου,
ἀμὲ νὰ τρῶς, νὰ πίνῃς ἀναπαμένα μετὰ καὶ τῆς μητρός μου,
καὶ τοὺς πολέμους, πατέρα μου, κουρσεύματα καὶ ἀμάχες,
ἑξάφῃς τα εἰς τὸν φίλον σου καὶ εἰς τὸν υἱόν σου, ἀφέντη (L113-7).

Similarly, the father of Digenis after the hero's first feat tells him how he shall let go of any cares and worries because of his son (ἀπάρτι πᾶσαν μέριμναν ρίψω ἐκ τὴν ψυχὴν μου, G IV, v. 211). Common wording can additionally be found in the description of their horses, first in *Digenis* G IV, vv. 241 and 244: ἤττον ὁ ἵππος τολμηρὸς καὶ θρασὺς εἰς τὸ παίζειν ... πῶς μὲν

⁸ Wartenberg 1900,195.

⁹ See, Holton 2002.

¹⁰ See, Agapitos 2004, 21-26 and 29-30.

ο ἵππος ἔπαιζε κατὰ γνώμην τοῦ νέου, and then in the *Achilleid*, v. 293: ὡσάν ὁ μαῦρος μεθυστῆ καὶ ἀρχίση διὰ νὰ παίζη.

Another parallel are the scenes in which Achilles and Digenis after falling in love lose their appetite. Their mothers become concerned attempting to find what has happened. In the exact order of events and on the same night, Digenis performs a love song to the girl and so does Achilles. The girls agree to follow them and profess their love by saying how they have become their family now: Ἐσέναν ἔχω ἀπὸ σήμερον πατέραν καὶ μητέρα (L913). Digenis and Achilles then provoke the relatives of the girls. As a result a confrontation occurs. In *Digenis*, we find the defeat of the emir by the girl's brothers, who nonetheless is allowed to marry her, while Digenis and Achilles win the battle and leave the girls' relatives unharmed so as not to cause any heartbreak to their brides-to-be. Their wedding soon after takes place and in both scenes they receive the blessings of the girls' fathers.

In the *Achilleid* the wedding is followed by a scene in which Achilles saves everyone by defeating a lion. *Digenis* contains further fighting scenes with lions. Digenis kills his first lion at the age of twelve, his second when he is grown up, and later a third one that attempts to savage the girl to death. The way of killing differs. Achilles initially beats the lion with a stick, but then kills it with his bare hands splitting it into half, whereas Digenis always defeats his lions with the use of a stick. The vividness in the fighting and action scenes is remarkably expressed in both texts (e.g. killing of a lion, followed by the girls' songs expressing endless love and admiration in the bravery of their husbands, L 1248-1276/N 1604-1634 vs. E 1147-1148/G VI 106-108/T 1991-1997) as well as common wording in the description of Achilles' horse in comparison with the one of Maximou (με χινεὰν βαμένα, E 1487 vs. με τὸν χεννὰν βαμένα, L 846/με την χινέα βαμμένα, N 1200). Another possible parallel is the end of the Maximou scene in *Digenis* E where the girl asks him what he's been up to: «πολλὰ πολλὰ μοῦ ἄργησες» (E 1586); similarly, the girl asks Achilles after the combat with her brothers what has happened, using almost the same words: «πολλὰ ἤργησες, ἀφέντη» (L 1101). It is unknown which version of the *Digenis Akritas* exactly formed the source of the *Achilleid*. According to Mitsakis, the *Achilleid* may derive from another version of the *Digenis* unknown to us.¹¹

A recurring element in both texts is the notion of remembrance. In *Digenis*, the girl gives to the protagonist a ring and asks for him to forget her not. This reminds us of the earlier narrative incident in which the father of Digenis asks from his heroine a ring and she

¹¹ Mitsakis 1963, 15-16.

tells him to forget her not. Again, the emperor ends his letter to Digenis before their meeting by telling him to forget him not. In the *Achilleid*, the girl instead of providing Achilles with a ring presents him with a garland of flowers from her garden as a symbol of her love for him and only at the end of the London version the girl makes a mention of him forgetting her not (v. 1320): Μακάριζέ με, καρδία μου, καὶ μὴ μὲ ἀλησμονήσης.¹²

A significant difference between the two texts is that in *Digenis* there is no exchange of love letters between the protagonists as in the *Achilleid*. The only letters mentioned are those of the mother of emir who scolds her son for rejecting his faith and country for the love of a Christian woman and the correspondence between the emperor and Digenis. As noted by Mitsakis, *erotika pittakia* became more popular in the Komnenian period in romances such as *Hysmine and Hysminias*¹³ and *Drosilla and Charikles*. It is reasonable to assume that the author of the original *Achilleid* was familiar with these and incorporated them in his narration.¹⁴

In the *Achilleid* there are many references to the patriarchal ideas of the Byzantine society. For instance, the male code of behaviour is under threat in the castle's garden, which in Byzantine romances constitutes a key element of narrative space:¹⁵ having entered there, Achilles says that if he were to be discovered, the girl's brothers would definitely kill him as an unmanly coward. When the couple consummate their love, however, Achilles boasts about his feat to her brothers. At a later point in the narrative, Achilles interprets the girl's fears of his safety as doubts of his manliness and claims he would have hit her, had he not loved her. This macho heroism is one of the reasons why Beaton thinks that the *Achilleid* «represents a bridge from the mixture of heroic and romance elements in *Digenis* to the fully fledged vernacular romance as we find it developed in *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*».¹⁶

The episode of Achilles' ordering a drawing of Aphrodite in his bed-chamber and praying to *Eros* before this image may indicate familiarity with the iconography of *Eros* found in the twelfth-century romance *Hysmine and Hysminias*. The paintings of *Eros* are a part of the process of falling in love. In the *Achilleid*, it is only after Achilles's invocation to *Eros* and the subsequent deity's appearance to the girl in a dream-like vision that she

¹² Only in the Oxford version, however, there is a mention of this notion immediately after the girl gives the garland of flowers to Achilles: εὔξου με, κόρη, εὔξου με, μὴ μὲ ἀλησμονήσης (v. L 501).

¹³ Translation by Jeffreys 2012.

¹⁴ Mitsakis 1963, 51.

¹⁵ Space can form the setting for particular events within the narrative. Narrative space, as defined by Agapitos, is «a constituent of the narrative situation. As such it shapes the given episode within the narrative process in equal proportion to time and in conjunction with the action contained therein», in: Agapitos 1991, 273 and Agapitos 1999, 116-17. Cf. Hoffmann 1978, 1-53.

¹⁶ Beaton 1996, 105-06.

verses L534-536 the tree built by the girl's father in her garden sings when moved by the wind:

Καὶ ἀπὲ τὸν πόθον τὸν πολλὺν τὸν εἶχεν ὁ πατήρ της
ἔκαμεν χρουσὸν δεντρὸν στὴν μέσην τοῦ περιβολίου
καὶ ὅταν τὸ ἔκρουεν ὁ ἄνεμος, ἔμμορφα ἐτραγούδειεν.

It is referred to as plane-tree at verses L 728, 789, 807, 970 and 971 and is the same plane-tree found in the other two versions. In the Naples version, there is a more elaborate *ekphrasis* of it (N 792-821) that reveals the presence of skillfully contrived golden birds (καὶ πῶς ἐκατασκεύασεν τοῦ κιλαδεῖν πουλίαι, N 801) that would sing whenever the wind would blow (τὰ δὲ χρυσὰ πουλίτσια, τὰ τῆς χρυσοπλατάνου, ὅταν ἄνεμος ἔπνεεν πάντοτε ἐκιλαδοῦσαν, N 816-817). There is a connection here with the golden plane-tree of Emperor Theophilos and its warbling bird-like automatons mentioned in Byzantine sources. The wind acts as a sexual power that fertilises the tree, which in turn becomes a symbol of *Eros*. This is the tree in which *Eros* appears in the guise of a bird and shoots his arrows at the princess. It is there where a nightingale sings to comfort the girl as she is waiting for Achilles. The girl also notices Achilles for the first time as he lands near this tree after he jumps inside the castle to meet her (L 807). The brief description of her bed constructed by her father (L 537-539) follows immediately after the one of the plane-tree.

There are two texts that are undoubtedly heavily indebted to the *Achilleid*: the *Tale of Belisarios* and *Imberios and Margarona*. For the *Tale of Belisarios*, see Spadaro and Van Gemert²¹; for *Imberios*, see Wartenberg, Hesseling, Mitsakis and Smith.²² Apart from these two texts, there are many more that are thought to have been influenced by, or to have influenced, the *Achilleid*.²³ However, most of these alleged common elements between the *Achilleid* and the Palaeologan romances are not literary borrowings at all, but reflect a shared oral substratum and/or result from the demands of an evolving literary genre.

There are several theories on the matter of oral influence. Eideneier distinguishes oral tradition from oral composition. As he explains, poetic *koine*, the scribes' choice of language in writing, and the spoken language differ, but both evolve at the same time. Elizabeth Jeffreys as well indicates the possibility of scribes using a poetic *Kunstsprache* affected both by the evolving spoken language of the time and as well by the oral tradition written in

²¹ See, Spadaro 1976, 278-310; Spadaro 1980-1981, 23-41; Spadaro 1987, 340-48.

²² See, Wartenberg 1900, 197; Hesseling 1919, 13; Mitsakis 1963, 67-71; Smith 1999, 89-90.

²³ See, for instance, Spadaro 1977-1978, 233-79.

political verse that required certain metrical or linguistic forms.²⁴ According to Eideneier, we are essentially dealing with fixed texts, written in an “interlocal, intercommunal and interdialectic poetic koine”²⁵, which at one point became part of the oral tradition. He indicates an important contradiction concerning scribal practice; on the one hand scribes would make use of the poetic *koine* and political verse, and on the other hand they would introduce a higher linguistic register at certain points in their texts in a possible attempt to display their level of education. As a result *Mischstil*, a mixed language style appears and we therefore find different, but equally valuable versions of the same text with variants (*sinnvolle varianten in phonetischer Verwandtschaft*)²⁶ that cannot be interpreted as scribal errors.

At certain points in time a sophisticated poet may have composed a version of a text for a particular audience and not for the public. The more sophisticated audience perhaps would enjoy reading texts in more vernacular language as in the case of the mixed language of Ptochoprodromika. The written text could also be used by another poet and re-composed orally for performance purposes and again be copied down in writing. The poet in this way assumes the role of the performer²⁷ and imposes his own linguistic and metrical ideas and beliefs on the text he is copying/performing. On this subject a distinction is made by M. Jeffreys between more sophisticated poets that fully used oral stylistic characteristics and less appropriate to writing, and unsophisticated ones that applied in their writing the oral style as it existed since the works of some were sponsored by western patrons, who expected accurate reproduction of the oral style. The scribes’ duty in the latter case was to maintain the general content of their source text and accurately transmit the general sense of it but not to copy exactly every linguistic form.²⁸ In cases where a scribe has copied more than one text, M. Jeffreys rightly proposes to not fully accept the common elements between the texts as the result of the scribe’s creative talents. They were probably done mechanically as the texts were copied one after the other.

It becomes evident that a scribe was able to alter a text in language and metre either according to his own preferences, his school education, memory or in terms of his audience. Hence, the different versions of a text have to be re-evaluated and their different elements to

²⁴ Jeffreys 1996, Lxxix.

²⁵ Translated from ‘διατοπική, διακοινοτική και υπερδιαλεκτική’ in: Eideneier, Moennig and Toufexis 2001, 48.

²⁶ Eideneier 2005, 18.

²⁷ On the matter of performance see Ehler and Schaefer 1998, 248-73.

²⁸ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 1979, 313-4.

be considered as equally important as the 'original' text, especially since they are the outcome of a lesser or greater re-composition before the audience they were performed.

According to Beaton,²⁹ there are three schools of thought on the texts' oral background. The first school, comprising scholars such as Hesseling and Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys, proposes that traces of a massively productive oral tradition can be detected in many medieval vernacular texts, including the romances. Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys refer to a continuous oral tradition that affected both the composition and the written transmission.³⁰ Other scholars, however, such as Wartenberg, Kriaras, Mitsakis and Spadaro, argue that verbal parallels between different texts are direct literary borrowings - and Spadaro believes that this literary imitation results from a lack of poetic talent among Byzantine authors.³¹ The third school (among whom Schreiner, van Gemert and Bakker) attribute these verbal parallels to scribal interference and claim that scribes, after copying a text, would borrow previously read and copied lines and expressions when copying the next one in the same manuscript. Beaton seeks to combine the valuable elements of each of these theories: his proposal is that poets consciously imitated the style and the linguistic expressions of oral poetry in order to create a new literary idiom.³²

In order to gain a better insight into this matter, suggestions are made by M. Jeffreys for scholars to examine the Greek learned tradition at all its stages and understand its possible alterations in the written products of the Byzantine oral tradition by preparing complete analyses of poems. This can be done with the help of comparative methods, such as in the studies of Parry³³ and Lord³⁴. Parry and Lord after examining groups of Yugoslavian poets during wars and the Homeric influence on their poems, noticed many common repeated phrases, themes as well as line enjambment. As the majority of the poets were said to be illiterate, the composition of these works could only be explained in terms of an oral tradition. Arising from the initial proposals of Lord³⁵ and Trypanis³⁶, M. Jeffreys performed a comparative research for a number of early Modern Greek poems³⁷ and found parallel elements between Greek texts with non-Greek ones, especially with the French epic *chanson de geste*. The particular choice of texts by M. Jeffreys was made in terms of the volume of

²⁹ On theories about orality see Beaton 1996, 164-88 and 222-24. See also, Sifakis 1993.

³⁰ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 1971, 122-60; Jeffreys 1973, 164-95; idem 1974, 141-96.

³¹ See Spadaro 1976, 278-310; idem 1977-1978, 233-79.

³² Beaton 1996, 181-88. See Papatomopoulos and Jeffreys 1996, 1.

³³ Parry 1971.

³⁴ Lord 1960.

³⁵ Lord 1954.

³⁶ Trypanis 1963, 1-3.

³⁷ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 1983; M. Jeffreys 1987, 139-63.

poems available, their close dating to early Modern Greek verse and more importantly, the extensive statistical analyses of formulas in Medieval French by Duggan³⁸. Following Duggan's criteria, Jeffreys discovered a high percentage (20%) of formulaic repetitions in the *Chronicle of the Morea* and the *War of Troy*, which he considered as non-coincidental, but indicative of an oral tradition. He made clear however that the same percentage is highly unlikely to be found in the *Alexander* poem, *Ptochoprodromika* and *Digenis*.³⁹

On the actual function of repetitive phrases in written verse, Jeffreys pointed to the study of Bäuml in Medieval German. Bäuml interpreted the poets' use of formulas as an attempt to associate their works with the oral tradition so as to gain authority from this. The repetitions indicated by Bäuml are not considered by Jeffreys as fully functional oral formulas, but the poems again allude to lost traditions of formulaic poetry.

Beaton used Bäuml's study as well in an attempt to indicate the poets' conscious intention to refer to contemporary ballad-style poetry resembling the Modern Greek folk songs. It becomes difficult to find evidence in support of this since the scribes employed a variety of linguistic and metrical elements according to their own preferences in different texts. According to Jeffreys⁴⁰, if we are to accept that songs resembling Modern Greek folk songs were already sung in the twelfth century, then perhaps another oral tradition existed with characteristics of a narrative type similar to the case of Spanish epic and *romancero*. The many similarities of the Spanish and Greek poetry in medieval times⁴¹ become even more evident when comparing *Digenis* and the legend of *El Cid*. Regarding Spanish poetry, Pidal in similar terms makes a distinction between oral tradition and oral transmission and differentiates the folk poetry from the traditional poetry.⁴² On the one hand, there is the popular text that is repeated as it is and on the other hand, the traditional poetry that is re-composed when performed. As Pidal mentions, a folk song can be re-composed in a different era, area and by a different creator from the ones who produced various versions of this. The poem therefore becomes the result of numerous re-compositions and as there is not just one creator, but many, the poem comes down to us anonymously.⁴³

As Jeffreys explains, the medieval scribes recognised in the texts a "style which they knew from oral sources and included in their copying elements of oral style re-

³⁸ Duggan 1969.

³⁹ M. Jeffreys proposes that a clear sign of the oral influence in a poem is when these formulaic phrases fill at least 25-30% of the whole poem (see Jeffreys and Jeffreys 2016, 74).

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 74.

⁴¹ For instance see, Egea 1996, 139-51.

⁴² On this matter see, Pidal 1953.

⁴³ See Pidal 1973, 344.

composition”⁴⁴. The use of formulas confirms the existence of some oral-formulaic composers and as has been earlier mentioned we would expect that their individual performances would have affected the poems and further transmission as well. Jeffreys comes to the conclusion that there was a narrative Greek oral tradition in the decapentasyllable in the early Modern Greek texts which employed many hemistich formulas of a narrative type with certain linguistic variation. The particular style, according to him, was widespread and so commonly used that it greatly influenced scribes.⁴⁵ The importance of the texts’ oral background has been emphasized even more lately⁴⁶ and there have been recent attempts to trace formulaic phrases as in the case of Moennig for the late romance *Alexander and Semiramis*⁴⁷ and Shawcross for the *Chronicle of the Morea*⁴⁸.

According to Chatziyiakoumis, the Escorial manuscript of *Libistros* and *Digenis* and the London one of the *Achilleid* seem to suggest a movement around 1500 which led to the writing of such manuscripts altering the linguistic form from learned to a more simplified one. In terms of the political verse this meant the addition or subtraction of syllables, thus creating hypometric or hypermetric lines that could not be ‘healed’ by modern editors. Chatziyiakoumis interpreted these as signs of a later tendency to rhyme poems (e.g. *Imberios*, *Digenis*) or even write them as a prose (*Digenis*).⁴⁹ Morgan⁵⁰ proposed that the Escorial text of *Digenis* is the *aide-mémoire* of an oral bard. Beaton has also traced oral elements to a certain degree in the manuscripts of *Digenis*⁵¹. Fenik as well noted the significance of formulas in Escorial *Digenis*.⁵² Morgan’s arguments however were rejected by Chatziyiakoumis⁵³, who deemed unlikely that the extra syllables were performance features of folk songs for which perhaps there would be no need to record in writing.

In addition, assumptions are made about the texts’ similarity in the overall structure of the lines and words within each text and from one text to another. They could be the result of plagiarism. It is also possible that they are drawn from formulaic phrases or they occur because of the restraints of the metre, the language and the choice of a particular content. It is difficult to address all these matters with certainty as little is known about the educational and

⁴⁴ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 1986, 534-7. For similar conclusions see also, Nichols 1990, 1-10; Wenzel 1990, 11-8; Fleishmann 1990, 19-37.

⁴⁵ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 1986, 537.

⁴⁶ Mavromatis and Agiotis 2012.

⁴⁷ Moennig 2004.

⁴⁸ See Shawcross 2009.

⁴⁹ Chatziyiakoumis 1977, 248.

⁵⁰ Morgan 1960, 44-68.

⁵¹ Beaton 1990, 177-82.

⁵² Fenik 1991.

⁵³ Chatziyiakoumis 1977, 248-49.

social background of the poets, the audience and the circumstances in which they were created or heard⁵⁴.

Though few would deny the influence of oral poetry on the *Achilleid*, the parallels between this text and other Palaeologan sources cannot be explained solely in terms of orality. A good example is the parallel between lines N 27-28: Εἷς τῶν Ἑλλήνων βασιλεύς, πανευγενῆς καὶ ἀνδρεῖος, / πλούσιος καὶ πανευτυχῆς ἐν χώρᾳ Μυρμιδόνων, and the beginning of the *War of Troy*, vv. 1-2: Ἴην τις Ἑλλήνων βασιλεύς, εὐγενικός, ἀνδρεῖος, / πλούσιος καὶ πανευτυχῆς, χώρας τῆς Μυρμιδόνος in the version of ms. Paris Coislin 744 and ἦν τοῖς Ἑλλήνοις βασιλεύς, εὐγενικός, ἀνδρεῖος, / πλούσιος δὲ πανευτυχῆς, χώρας δὲ Μυρμιδόνων in ms. Bologna, Univ. gr. 3567.⁵⁵ According to Hesseling, who was the first to spot this striking similarity, this and other parallels between the *Achilleid* and the *War of Troy*⁵⁶ are proof of ‘un style peu individuelle’ and show that the two poets make use of ‘des mêmes matériaux linguistiques.’⁵⁷

Although Hesseling rightly pointed out that the opening lines of the *War of Troy* do not correspond with the French original,⁵⁸ Spadaro attempted to prove the dependence of the *Achilleid* (focusing mainly on the Naples version) on the *War of Troy*, unaware of the fact that none of the parallels between the two texts derive from the *Roman de Troie*.⁵⁹ For Spadaro, these parallels show that the *War of Troy* was first and the *Achilleid* second, and prove, once again, that no Greek poet was capable of writing a decent line without a foreign source at hand.

Beaton, on the contrary, argues that the opening lines of the *War of Troy* and the *Achilleid* are in fact a literary *topos*, not only found here, but also in many other romances: *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, *Velthandros and Chrysantza*, *Tale of Troy*, *Theseid*, and even the *Digenis*, which all begin with ‘There was a certain king’, ‘One of the kings’, or ‘King so-and-so’, followed by an account of how powerful these kings were and how they had sons, and these sons then turn out to be the hero of the story.⁶⁰ So this is a traditional formula which may have an oral origin, but is used in reference to a developing literary genre. There can be no doubt that Beaton is right on this point, but the fact remains that saying that the hero’s father is king ‘in the land of the Myrmidons’ is not a traditional element, but can only

⁵⁴ Beaton 1990, 177-82.

⁵⁵ See Papathomopoulos and Jeffreys 1996, 1.

⁵⁶ Recently convincingly re-dated by Jeffreys 2013 to the late thirteenth century.

⁵⁷ Hesseling 1919, 12-14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

⁵⁹ Spadaro 1978, 1-9.

⁶⁰ Beaton 1996, 171-76.

be found in the *Achilleid* and the *War of Troy*. This seems to be a literary borrowing. According to E. Jeffreys, it simply is an addition by the Greek scribe of the *War of Troy* in an attempt to present more clearly the story and the relationship of the characters⁶¹. Although at a previous point she mentions that the scribe follows the French text faithfully and makes little additions or omissions, it is stated that the text's connection with *Roman de Troie* cannot be accurately defined until the French text and its versions are assessed even further. The original Greek translation of the French text, which is dated around the 14th century, has not come down to us nor does the French original of the text the Greek scribe was copying from.⁶² At the present stage, seeing that there are no Myrmidons (let alone, the 'land of Myrmidon' that we find in the *War of Troy*) in the *Roman de Troie*,⁶³ a strong argument can be made in terms of which text borrowed from which. One should consider the possibility that the *War of Troy* imitates the *Achilleid* and not the other way around, as generally believed.⁶⁴

Shawcross mentions that the *War of Troy* was likely to have been sponsored in the 1270's by Leonardo Da Veroli, Charles of Anjou's chancellor in the Morea, who commissioned the copying of manuscripts, including one in Greek⁶⁵, and who would be benefited by presenting himself as the representative of a ruler that assumed Trojan descent in Morea.⁶⁶ As Jeffreys point out in a recent article⁶⁷, similarly and from the 1260's it is believed that *Roman de Troie* was written to create a connection between Henry II of England and the Trojan background of European rulers. For instance, Trojan material is found in one of the *Roman de Troie*'s earliest manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1610) that is illustrated and dated to 1264, as well as in the illustrations of *Grandes chroniques de France*⁶⁸. According to Jeffreys, this confirms why many manuscripts of the *War of Troy* had empty spaces probably for the use of illustrations and why the Greek scribe chose the text he did instead of others that were in use from the middle of the thirteenth century. Based on this evidence, they come to the conclusion that it is possible that the *War*

⁶¹ Jeffreys and Papathomopoulos 1996, lix-lx.

⁶² See study by Jung 1996 and the 1998 edition of Benoît de Sainte-Maure by Baumgartner and Vieliard.

⁶³ De Sainte-Maure 1968.

⁶⁴ See also Beaton 1996, 174: «The conclusion to be drawn from a careful application of Spadaro's own methods is in fact the opposite of his. The translator of the *War of Troy* drew upon *Achilles* in the very first lines of his poem ...».

⁶⁵ See Dunbabin 1998.

⁶⁶ See Shawcross 2013, 57-79.

⁶⁷ Jeffreys and Jeffreys 2016, 77-78.

⁶⁸ Hedeman 1991, 12-13.

of Troy dates after the Treaty of Viterbo in 1267, which moved Morea into the Angevin orbit, and Leonardo's death in 1281.

If the *War of Troy* dates to c. 1270⁶⁹, this could mean that the ur-*Achilleid* (not the three versions N, O and L, which are late Byzantine and post-Byzantine) can be ascribed to the thirteenth or even the twelfth century. Further proof for such a remarkable early date is the Florentine witness⁷⁰ of the *Achilleid*, which too seems to suggest that a form of the *Achilleid* already circulated in the thirteenth century.⁷¹ This is a tenth-century manuscript of John Klimax' *Heavenly Ladder*⁷², in which a later hand, dated to the thirteenth century by Rostagno⁷³, has added four verses on fol. 6^v:

ἼΩ τύμβε πικρὲ καὶ πολλῶν πόνων γέμων,
ἔχω σε καὶ βλέπω σε ἐχθρὸν καὶ φίλον
φίλον μὲν ὡς ἔχοντα τὴν πεφιλμένην,
ἐχθρὸν δὲ ὡς φθείραντα ταύτης τὰ κάλλη.

These mediocre verses (notice the hiatus in lines 2 and 4) would seem to be of little significance, were it not for the prose text written underneath these lines: τοιοῦτο ἐβόησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς εἰς τῆς συνεύου μνημα.⁷⁴ If these verses indeed refer to Achilles mourning the death of his wife, then this is a reference to the medieval romance. Nowhere in the many late antique and Byzantine sources that deal with the Trojan legend (Diktys of Crete, Malalas, Manasses, Tzetzes, etc.), do we find any reference to Achilles being married; in fact, the recounting of the Trojan material explicitly state that Achilles' desire to unite in matrimony with Polyxene led to his untimely death: so no marriage, no death of the bride, and no grieving widower either. It is only in the *Achilleid* that the marriage of Achilles and the daughter of the enemy king, her subsequent death and his bereavement are mentioned. Seeing that there is nothing remotely similar to these verses in any of the three versions (L, N and O), it is highly unlikely that this is a fragment of an earlier stage of the *Achilleid*, especially since it is written in dodecasyllable rather than political verse.

The *terminus post quem* is the *Digenis Akritas* (dates for which differ between the late eleventh and the mid twelfth centuries) because it is clearly the literary model of the

⁶⁹ Jeffreys 2013, 217-36. Whether the *War of Troy* led to the creation of the Palaeologan romance, as she claims, remains to be seen. For a radically different view see, Agapitos 1993, 97-134.

⁷⁰ See, Lambros 1913.

⁷¹ See also, Mitsakis 1963, 46-47 and Beaton 1996, 103.

⁷² See Martin 1954.

⁷³ See Lambros 1913, 344.

⁷⁴ See, Lambros 1913, 46-47.

Achilleid. More importantly, as none of the vernacular romances is so strongly influenced by *Digenis* as the *Achilleid*, one could argue that it stands midway between the *Digenis* and the Palaeologan romances: that is, as a kind of transitional text that connects the proto-romance of the *Digenis* with later developments. Since there is no hard evidence for any literary influence of the Palaeologan romances on the *Achilleid* (whereas the opposite can be demonstrated in the case of the *War of Troy*, the *Tale of Belisarios* and the *Imberios*), it makes sense to view the *Achilleid* as a direct response to the *Digenis*. The opposite scenario would be to postulate that the author of the ur-*Achilleid* stubbornly ignored the Palaeologan romances and chose as his literary model a text that was at least two hundred years old, if not older.

The many references to Frankish culture, hairstyles and clothing,⁷⁵ but also the obvious fear of the Latins, as in the scene of the Φραγκόπουλος, constitute another *terminus post quem*:

Καὶ ἓνας καλὸς νέος, ἔμορφος καβελλάρης,||
Φραγκόπουλος ἐρωτικός, πλούσιος, ἀντρειωμένος,
φαρὶν ἐκαβαλίκεψεν, μαῦρον ὡσὰν ἐλαίαν·
πίανει σκουταροκόνταρον καὶ ἤμπεν εἰς τὴν μέσην.
Κανεῖς ἀπὲ τοὺς δώδεκα οὐκ ἠμπόρεσε νὰ τὸν ρίξη,
ἀλλὰ ὄλους ἐφοβέρισεν ἢ κονταρέα τοῦ Φράγκου· (L 1198-1205)

The fact that only a hero as formidable as Achilles succeeds in defeating this frightening knight (L 1198-1241), strongly suggests that other Byzantines were usually not so fortunate in their encounters with the Latins. This makes sense after the tragic events of the Fourth Crusade and the humiliating experiences of further conflicts throughout the thirteenth century. As the *Achilleid* presents Achilles to be the hero of the Greeks -their sole hero against the hated Latins-, the romance must almost certainly have been composed in a region still ruled by the Byzantines: either Nicaea, Epirus or Trebizond before 1261, or Constantinople after that date. In addition, the consistent use of words such as σκλάβος (L 597), τρίδουλον (L 609), δούλη (L 915/1275), δούλους (L 861), ἀδούλωτον (L 755), ἀκαταδούλωτος (L 709), ἐκαταδούλωσες (L 755) regarding emotional bonds between people, bear witness to how feudal relations affect the representation of the symbolic world of the

⁷⁵ For these Frankish elements, see Smith 1999, 90-91 and 114-117. Michailidis 1993 incorrectly assumed that Achilles' Frankish haircut dated to the early fifteenth century; see the criticisms of Agapitos 2006, 53-55 and Lendari 2007, 67-68 in their respective editions of Livistros, who both point out that there are already twelfth-century testimonies for this particular haircut.

Achilleid. To be in love means to serve love and to be the servant of the loved one. In my view, this discourse of servitude reflects the strengthening of feudal bonds in post-1204 Byzantium. But of course, as long as we do not have a clear understanding of what the actual texts transmitted or of the sociocultural circumstances in which they were written any attempt to establish an accurate textual dependency may be fruitless.