

## Exiling Achilles? Banishment and Retribution in Plutarch's *Lives*

Judith Mossman has discussed epic elements in two works of Plutarch, namely the *Lives of Alexander* and *Pyrrhus* (Mossman, 1988 and 1992). Mossman notes how “Achilles is the sole template against which Alexander measures himself” (1992, 91), and Plutarch shows how Pyrrhus aspires to the exalted status of Alexander by engaging in Achillean actions, such as Homeric duels and battling against raging floods (cf. Mossman 1992, 95; Duff 1999, 121-2). In such cases, the allusions of Pyrrhus to Achilles are intertwined with comparisons to Alexander, providing two models on which to evaluate the attempted likeness of Pyrrhus to his Macedonian idol.

Though these two *Lives* most explicitly draw upon Achilles-like imagery, they are not the only biographies that employ reminiscences to the Homeric hero. Among others, Plutarch's *Alcibiades* contains some particularly unique references to Achilles (Duff 1999, 236-7), and Philopoemen is raised like “Achilles by Phoenix” (*Philop.* 1.2). Both Aristides and Camillus are explicitly compared to Achilles, and the historiographical tradition surrounding Camillus compares him to Achilles (Livy, 5.32.9) and seems to reference other events of the Trojan War (see especially Kraus, 1994). In these latter two *Lives*, Plutarch alludes specifically to the *Iliad* in describing the events surrounding their exiles. The exiles of Aristides and Camillus depict his subjects' frustration at being treated unjustly, similar to a particularly famous scene of the *Iliad*, when Achilles begs Zeus to aid the Trojans and harm the Greeks because of his loss of honor (*Il.* 1.407-12). In two instances in the *Lives* of Aristides and Camillus, Plutarch portrays prayers that recall Achilles' own request of Zeus, and in the *Life of Coriolanus*, anger overwhelms the statesman to such an extent that he immediately, like Achilles, seeks vengeance on his former friends. Much as how Plutarch employs the figure of Achilles as a basis of comparison for the actions of Alexander and Pyrrhus, the acts of these three statesmen upon their exile also draw comparison to the great Homeric hero, but, with Achilles once more as a starting point, also elicit contrasts between the relative virtues of the Camillus, Coriolanus, and Aristides themselves.

In fact, the actions of the fugitives in these three *Lives* underscore particular virtues or flaws of each hero. Aristides' noble and magnanimous prayer—“the opposite that Achilles made” (*Arist.* 7.8)—that the Athenians may never have cause to miss him stresses Plutarch's depiction of his steadfast, unselfish character in the face of Themistocles' constant, Odyssean scheming. Camillus, somewhat more circumspectly, prays for punishment, “like Achilles” (*Cam.* 13.1), if he had been exiled out of *hubris* and envy. Coriolanus, in contrast, departs from Rome in a silent fury and visits Rome's great enemy Tullus Aufidius. There, he asks for aid in taking vengeance on the Romans. Instead of praying for protection of his countrymen or appealing to divine justice, Coriolanus takes matters into his own, overly emotional hands. Allusions to Achilles in these works both reflect each characters' virtue in comparison to Achilles' own, but also compel the reader to compare Plutarch's statesmen by analyzing each man's relative virtue in the face of generally undeserved exile.

### **Bibliography:**

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