The Divine Arming of Achilles

In Homer’s *Iliad* there are three sets of arms that belong to or are given to Achilles. The first set is that which Achilles himself gives to Patroklos to wear in Book 16 (*Il*.16.130-139). Patroklos dons this set of arms; however, upon his death at the hands of Hector, the arms are lost to the Trojans. A second set of arms for Achilles is then requested by his mother Thetis, to be forged at the hands of Hephaistos. This set is equipped by Achilles in Book 19 (*Il*.19.369-391), in a passage which is almost an exact replica of the previous arming scene of Patroklos in Book 16. Comparisons between these two passages have been a frequent topic of scholarship (e.g. Arend, 1933; Armstrong, 1958; Janko, 1992, Kakridis, 1961, etc.). However, there is a third set of arms provided to Achilles which has been all but overlooked in scholarship (mentioned briefly in Edwards, 1991 and Griffen, 1980). This is a temporary set placed upon him by Athena in Book 18 (*Il*.18.203-231) while he awaits his new set Thetis is arranging. Unlike the other two sets, this set of arms is not material but rather ethereal in nature; Athena arms him in the aegis, the cloud, and augments his yell into a lethal weapon.

In this paper I wish first to demonstrate that this scene is set up to be an arming scene similar to that of other arming scenes in the poem (such as of Paris, Agamemnon, Patroclus, Achilles, and Athena). There are three pieces of evidence to support this theory. First, it is called an arming. Iris has bent sent by Hera to tell Achilles to arm (θωρήσσεσθαι, *Il*.18.167). Second, the arming scene begins with a similar formula for arming (ὤμοις ἰφθίμοισι βάλ' αἰγίδα θυσσανόεσσαν, *Il*.18.204) that we find in Athena’s arming scene in Book 5 (ἀμφὶδ'ἄρ' ὤμοισινβάλετ'αἰγίδαθυσσανόεσσαν, *Il*.5.738). And third, the sequence which characterizes arming scenes (shield before helmet before spear) is also present in this scene.

Then having demonstrated that this is in fact an arming scene, I wish to discuss the significance of Achilles arming in divine raiment. **One point of note is that the twelve men killed by Achilles’ divine shout foreshadows the funeral of Patroklos, for which Achilles captures twelve men for sacrifice (*Il*.21-26-28). Furthermore, Achilles shouts three times, and three times the Trojans are routed. At this third shout the men are killed. This is reminiscent of power of the gods, particularly Apollo in his encounters with Diomedes (*Il*.5.346-347), Patroclus (*Il*.16.702-704, 16.784-786), and Achilles (*Il.*20.445-446). However, in this instance, Achilles is taking the role of the divine being, while the Trojans take the role of the thrice-approaching mortal.**

**The most significant aspect which this scene demonstrates is the status of Achilles in the poem. This set of arms places Achilles above the lot of ordinary heroes; it places him in the realm of the divine. It is unlike the set made by Hephaistos, which, although divinely created, is still of earthly matter. This set of arms given to Achilles by Athena is ethereal. Achilles becomes the aegis-bearer, and, with the presence of the clouds upon his head and a thunderous, terrifying voice, the audience is strongly reminded of Zeus, the aegis-bearer, the cloud-gatherer. This implicit comparison of Achilles with Zeus becomes even stronger when the prophecy of Achilles birth is considered: that the son of Thetis would be more powerful than his father. Had Zeus lain with Thetis, Achilles would have usurped power from Zeus himself and would have become the ruler of both gods and men. In this scene there is mention of Achilles as “Aiakides” (*Il*.18.221-2), which reflects the fact that Achilles is in the line of Zeus. Thus, the image of this scene is strikingly potent, implying all the potential power within Achilles. In conclusion, this scene reveals Achilles in the light of the god he could have been. It elevates him to the level of god-head and reflects again the central role that Achilles plays in the poem.**

Works Cited

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