

## Deidamia Achilli

This translation shows an epistle, a letter directed to another person, from the wife of Achilles, Deidamia, to Achilles himself while he was away at Troy. Between lines 9 and 38 of the translation, Deidamia details Achilles departure to join the Trojan war and his belief of his victorious return (9-22); it then goes on to talk about how she and Achilles son await his return, as “the fifth sun renews the year which has been completed four times”<sup>1</sup> (9). Achilles son did later join the war in Troy following the death of Achilles, but was eventually killed. The Trojan war was a long period of time during the Bronze Age in Greece, thought to be around 10 years. Detailed in the Illiad, the stories of Achilles and the Trojan War are well known. During the time he was in Troy, Achilles is famously said to have taken the slave girl Briseis as a ‘war-prize’, something which can be seen eluded to in the translation.

The purpose of the letter from Deidamia to Achilles is that of a wife lamenting the absence of her husband and wanting his return, as seen in when Deidamia states “I beg for your return day and night”<sup>2</sup>; there is also the mentions of the son that they share and his want to be like his father. The emotive way in which Deidamia explains how Achilles leaving for Troy and being away for many years, by the time of it’s writing, has affected her is what would be expected of a wife whose husband had gone to war; though when analysed with the knowledge of Achilles actions, such as being with Briseis, in Troy, the somber tone of the translation can be viewed in a different light of a begrudged wife to an unfaithful husband. Between lines 27 and 31, Deidamia is explaining how she finds no comfort from her grief of Achilles absence, neither in food or sleep: “no consolation has been pleasing to me in my misery... food begrudgingly consumed... my limbs were refreshed by no bed. See I am more and more weighed down and, impatient with grief,”<sup>3</sup>. The aim of Deidamia in this is to explain to Achilles the loss she feels and the grief, despite (as translated earlier in the passage) Achilles promises upon his departure of all that his success and return would bring from Troy, “you will happily see me return, when Trojan booty will follow white horses and when gifts of foreign treasure will come to you”<sup>4</sup>.

In lines 36-37, Deidamia talks about the son she shares with Achilles and the way in which he is worthy of being the son of Achilles, however will not be an equal to him: “he is worthy to have such a father, except that none is able to become equal with you”<sup>5</sup>. Achilles is an important figure in Greek mythos, with the stories of him being ones that exaggerate his power and the strength over other men. The tales of Achilles were looked up to and revered by other prominent figures through history, such as Alexander the Great. In this extract of the translation, the tone is somewhat of an inflator; the legend of Achilles was not something which became prominent after his death, rather during his life he was seen above other men. Line 38 makes mention of Achilles “savagery, which the burning of the Stygian Water bestowed”, this is reference to the waters of the River Styx that Achilles

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<sup>1</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 9

<sup>2</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 32

<sup>3</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 27-31

<sup>4</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 19-21

<sup>5</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 36-37

mother, Thetis, was said to have dipped him in as a baby, resulting in Achilles being above other men. The waters were said to give powers and an invulnerability to the bestowed; this is said to be where the weakness of the 'Achilles heel' came from, as Thetis dipped Achilles while holding onto his heel as she did. By Deidamia stating how the son was "worthy" of Achilles, is a way of telling that he too would become great, by being worthy of a father bestowed with power.

Achilles never returned from the wars in Troy, and following his death the son he shared with Deidamia travelled to Troy and took part in the wars. Deidamia herself following the death of Achilles was said to have been given in marriage by her son. The son of Achilles and Deidamia was Neoptolemos, who is believed or said to be among the ancestors of Olympias of Epirus, the mother of Alexander the Great.

The overall commentary of the translation is that it is intended to demonstrate the feelings of a wife to her husband whose away at war. In myth, Deidamia was pregnant upon Achilles departure to the Trojan War, meaning the son they shared would by this point, four years since Achilles departure (possibly the beginning of the fifth based on what is stated in the ninth line of the translation, "the fifth sun renews the year") would not have met Achilles or learned from him. The stating of the fact that the son is worthy of Achilles is a way of showing that there would be a greatness in the child, only not equalling his father due to the powers bestowed by the waters of the river Styx.

When looking at the whole translation, what can be taken away from this piece is that of the lesser seen aspect of the Achilles legend. The tale of Achilles and the Trojan War usually includes mention of Patroclus and Briseis, fewer mentions are made to the wife and son of Achilles. This translation showcases the effect of Achilles departure on Deidamia and their son, with references later on in the translation to Briseis and the impact of Achilles relations with her ("the slave girl Briseis tarnishes the distinctions of Achilles"<sup>6</sup>). Further down in the extract, with the mentions of Briseis, the tone changes to one more of scorn then that of the sorrow seen in between lines 9 and 38 ("...now enjoy your captive mistress and Deidamia lies in a widowed bed"<sup>7</sup>). With the letter being written for Achilles himself, the letter is a form of familial communication; of a wife informing her husband of the state of home and the feelings in which their actions (Achilles absence and infidelity) have created. A final commentary of the extract would be that it does succeed to an extent of garnering a sense of the emotions felt by Deidamia, showing the devolution further down into the extract; beginning in a way that showcased the widow aspect of Deidamia, but evolving into the feelings of anger, similarly to how letters written will begin in one toner and then shift as the writer gets more invested in the thoughts that they are expressing.

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<sup>6</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 69

<sup>7</sup> Deidamia Achilli. 81-82