

Heroism and *virtus* in Latin epic (Alexander and/or Achilles)

- Alexander features in epic: explicitly (*Alexandreis*; Lucan 10 references)

and implicitly: *see* Vergil *Aeneid* 6.791-795 on Augustus: emulator of Hercules and Bacchus (6.801-5) and by implication Alexander the Great

NB here also link between becoming divine and dominion over the inhabited world (Alexander thought he had come to birthplace of Dionysus, Nysa: parallels between him and Dionysus)

“This is the man, whom you will often hear promised to you, Augustus Caesar, **son of a god**, will found a golden age in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn; he will advance his empire beyond the Garamants and the **Indians**, to a land which lies beyond our stars...”



Alexander in Latin epic



Silius *Punica* 13.762-76 (underworld) “Then the priestess pointed to a young man and spoke thus: “That is he, who ranged in arms over every land, who found a way through Bactra and the Dahae, and drank of the Ganges—the Macedonian who threw a bridge over the Niphates, and whose city, named after himself, stands on the sacred Nile.” The Roman [Scipio] addressed him thus: “O true-born son of Libyan Ammon, since your undisputed fame eclipses that of all other commanders, and my heart is fired with the same thirst for glory, tell me the path by which you rose to your proud eminence and the topmost pinnacle of achievement.” Alexander made answer: “Cunning and caution disgrace a general. Boldness is the way to win a war. Valour without speed has never risen triumphant over danger. When there is great work to be done, do it instantly; dark death hovers over your head while you are acting.” Thus he spoke, and departed.”

(is individual glory a good thing in this epic?)



Alexander and/or Achilles in Latin epic



“the son here is inclined to imitate Alexander as a paradigm for the pursuit of renown, not the cultivation of excellence. Silius’ Alexander may recall Augustus’ achievements, but he is also a model for the republican Scipio of precisely that drive to individual glory through martial deeds that would destroy the Roman Republic” (B. Tipping, *Exemplary Epic* 2010)

- Achilles in epic: Verg. *Aen.* 1.466ff.: Achilles pictured on Dido’s temple wall (killing, securing glory)
- Valerius Flaccus: baby Achilles
- Statius, *Achilleid*



Virtus



“*Virtus* derived from *vir* [man], so thus had primary connotations of manliness, particularly military prowess, but it came to be extended more generally to civic or moral qualities, such as moral, mental or physical courage and excellence. Nevertheless it was still conceived of as inherently a man’s rather than a woman’s quality; women such as Lucretia to whom *virtus* is attributed for their display of unique courage and probity are often spoken of as having a masculine spirit or soul: cf. Val. Max. 4.6.5; 6.1.1.” (M. McAuley *Akroterion* 2010, 39, n 7)



Virtus/epic

- generic essentialism: epic stereotypically about “arms and the man” (Hinds)
- *virtus* in Latin epic: what kind of *virtus*?
- Keith (*Engendering Rome: Women in Latin epic* 2000): epic in education

What is virtus?

Catullus 64: virtus of Achilles/Peleus/Theseus

Previous tradition: open warfare v trickery- Achilles v Odysseus