INTRODUCTION

1 AUTHOR, DATE, CONTEXT

Achilles Tatius’ *The Matters Concerning Leucippe and Clitophon* (τὰ κατὰ Λευκίππην καὶ Κλειτοφῶντα) – hereafter *L&C* – was arguably the single most significant literary text written in Greek in the second century CE (Section 2(a)). We know little, however, about its author. A notice in the *Suda*, the tenth-century Byzantine encyclopaedia, reads as follows:

Ἀχιλλεὺς Στάτιος Ἀλεξανδρεύς, ὁ γράψας τὰ κατὰ Λευκίππην καὶ Κλειτοφῶντα καὶ ἄλλα ἐρωτικά ἐν βιβλίοις τῇ γέγονεν ἔσχατον Χριστιανὸς καὶ ἐπίσκοπος. ἔγραψε δὲ Περὶ σφαίρας καὶ ἔτυμολογίας, καὶ ἱστορίαν σύμμικτον, πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων καὶ θαυμαστῶν ἀνδρῶν μνημονεύουσαν. ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτοῦ κατὰ πάντα ὁμοίος τοῖς ἐρωτικοῖς.

Achilles Statius (sic) of Alexandria, the author of the novel concerning Leucippe and Clitophon (and other erotic matters) in 8 books. He converted late in life to Christianity, and became a bishop. He also wrote *On the Sphere* and *On Etymology*, and a *Miscellaneous History*, which records many great and wondrous men. His style is everywhere similar to the erotic romance.¹ (Συδ. α. 4695 = T v Vilborg.)

How much of this can we trust? That Achilles was from Alexandria, asserted without controversy by the MS tradition and two other Byzantine sources,² is credible. *L&C* incorporates an encomium of the city, placed at the significant position of the opening of the romance’s second half (5.1), and other laudatory references to Alexandria, to Egyptian cows and to the Nile suggest a particular affection (2.15.3–4n., 2.31.6n., 4.12); he also seems to have a certain amount of local knowledge.³ If Achilles was based in Egypt, that might explain why readers in Oxyrhynchus had copies of *L&C* so

¹ The position of καὶ ἄλλα ἐρωτικά in the sentence indicates that the phrase refers to other erotic stories within *L&C* (i.e. not other erotic texts).
² Vilborg 1962: 17 n. 10, by contrast, takes the last sentence to mean ‘His style is everywhere similar to that of the (other) romance writers.’

In particular, A. knows of the so-called *boukoloi* (Henrichs 1972: 48–50), and the recondite fact that their base was in Nicochis (4.12.8; cf. *PThomai* 1.104.16, with Bremmer 1998: 167). Claims (e.g. Vilborg 1962: 8) that his descriptions of the hippopotamus (4.2) and crocodile (4.19) are based on eye-witness experience seem to me less secure.
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soon after its composition (see Section 7). Residence in Alexandria does not necessarily entail Egyptian ethnicity in the narrow sense: Alexandria was home to many different communities, who each maintained (and sometimes had imposed upon them) a keen sense of their distinctness. Indeed, the description of an encounter with bandits during a journey up the Nile – a passage that implicitly connects their darker skin with the terror they inspired (3.9.2)5 – reflects the ingrained prejudices of a metropolitan urbanite with scant connection to or sympathy for inland Egyptians. Achilles’ world is centred on the Hellenised coastal cities of the eastern and south-eastern Mediterranean (see further Section 6(c)).

The name Achilles is common enough, and is found (inter alia) in Egypt. The ‘surname’ is more problematic.6 The Suda’s Στάτιος (found also in a few MSS) is possible: it is a common Roman name, and was borne by a reasonable number of Greek-speakers. Byzantine sources7 and the majority of MSS, however, give our author the name Τάτιος. Given that in Achilles’ time Greek was written without space between words, with a single (lunate) form of the letter sigma and without a discrete lower case, corruption of the authorial attribution either way could have occurred easily: the eye does not readily distinguish between ΑΧΙΛΛΕϹΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕϹΣΤΑΤΙΟΥ and ΑΧΙΛΛΕϹΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕϹϹΤΑΤΙΟΥ. The argument from the lectio difficilior – that is, the principle that obscure words are more likely to be corrupted into familiar ones than the reverse – tilts the balance in favour of ‘Tatius’.

In the light of Achilles’ probable Alexandrian origin, Tatius has been interpreted as an Egyptian theophoric name derived from the god Djehuty, known to the Greeks as Thoth or (in the hermetic tradition) Tat.8 This is not impossible, but there is no parallel, and (as noted above) Alexandrian origin does not necessarily imply Egyptian ethnicity. By contrast, Tat- names are found very commonly in Asia Minor; on this basis, one scholar has argued that Achilles must have been (like his predecessors) of Anatolian origin.9 Among all the many Anatolian Tat- names attested, however, Tatius itself is rare. It seems preferable to take the name as the regular Roman nomen. The double form of his name, moreover, might be taken to

5 Not that A. or any of his characters is ethnically ‘white’ in the modern sense: 1.4.3n.
7 Phot. Bibl. 87, 94 (T 11, iii Vilborg); Gregorius Corinthius, Commentarium in Hermogenis Librum Περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος vol. vii 2 p. 1236 RG Walz (= T vii Vilborg).
8 Rohde 1914 (1876): 501 n. 1.
suggest Roman citizenship. Tatius is indeed found in combination with Greek names: examples include L. Tatius Potamo (on Lesbos) and Tatius Andronicus (in Egypt). Greek Statii are more numerous, e.g. Q. Statius Sarapion and Q. Statius Themistocles at Athens. But there is a problem here: the convention in such cases (as in the examples quoted above) is for the Roman name (with or without a declared praenomen) to precede the Greek, which thereby becomes an individuating cognomen. This custom was complicated by the progressive nomenclative anarchy during the imperial period, but going on extant parallels it seems likelier that our author, if Roman, would have been called (S)Tatius Achilles rather than the reverse. One other possibility is worth reviving. At the head of ancient texts, the author’s name conventionally appeared alongside the title in the genitive case (marking authorship). The genitive is also used in names to indicate patronymics. Perhaps the author’s real name was simply Achilles son of Tatius. Nothing, however, is certain, and the name remains a puzzle.

The Suda’s story of his Christian conversion has convinced few modern scholars: it is suspiciously close to a tale told of another romancer, Heliodorus, who was held to have renounced his novel, converted, and taken up the bishopric of Tricca. Christians were enthusiastic, if conflicted, readers of the romances, and of L&C in particular (Section 2(b)); it is no surprise to find their authors retrospectively claimed as Christians. One passage in L&C appears to show familiarity with the Christian Gospels and the Eucharist ritual (2.2.5n.), but there is nothing in that episode indicating the active promotion of specifically Christian beliefs.

There is little to be said about the other works attributed to Achilles: On the Sphere, On Etymology and the Miscellaneous History. Fragments of an astronomical work On the Universe attributed to one ‘Achilles’ are preserved in a commentary on the Hellenistic poet Aratus. Is this On the Sphere, and is it the work of our author? The dates are compatible: the
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Excerpts quote authors of the second century CE, who thereby supply a terminus post quem, and a reference by the fourth-century Latin writer Firmicus Maternus to an astronomical text by ‘Achilles’ apparently supplies a terminus ante quem. The density of learned literary quotation in the excerpts, moreover, offers one possible connection with L&C, and indeed one Homeric passage may be evoked by both authors. But beyond these coincidences, there is no strong reason to connect the two; certainly nothing in L&C suggests a specific interest in astronomy. Scholarly consensus favours two distinct Achilleses, though some maintain that the two were already conflated in the Suda (i.e. that the work On the Sphere mentioned by the Suda, the work of a different Achilles, is the source of the surviving astronomical excerpts). Of the Miscellaneous History (ἰστορία σύμμικτος) – which the author of the Suda entry seems to have read personally – we have not a trace, although a marvel-filled miscellany could easily have issued from the same pen that composed the kaleidoscopic L&C.

When did Achilles write? An Oxyrhynchus papyrus fragment dated to the mid-to-late second century CE gives us a clear terminus ante quem. It was copied probably not more than a generation or two after the composition of our text. Achilles displays – albeit inconsistently – many of the hallmarks of Atticism, the archaising vogue for reconstructing the dialect of classical Athens that began in earnest in the early second century CE (Section 4(d)). Achilles also alludes to the romances of Xenophon of Ephesus and Chariton, both of which scholars tentatively place in the first century CE. A date in the first half of the second century, therefore, is most likely.

Not irrelevant to the question of dating is that of the era in which the narrative is set. Achilles gives few clues. The events must in principle postdate the construction of the lighthouse at Pharos in the late third century BCE (see 5.3–5), although anachronism is not unknown in the romances. Karl Pfeppelin believed he could date the narrative more precisely to the

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20 Adrastus of Aphrodisias (16, 19) and Claudius Ptolemaeus (19).
21 Firmicus Maternus 4.17.2.
22 Hom. II. 10.252–3; see Achilles the astronomer 1 di Maria, and 2.31.3n.
23 E.g. Broderson at BNP Achilles Tatius 2.
24 P.Oxy. 3836. On the role of papyri in the dating of A. see Henrichs 2011: 306–13; and see further below, Section 7.
25 Bowie 2003. On the allusions see below, Section 4(a).
26 Some would see in A.’s account of the boukoloi (bandits in the Egyptian countryside) a specific reference to the historical revolt of the boukoloi in 172–3 CE, but a post-173 date would be hard to square with the papyrological evidence; and in any case, the boukoloi must have existed, and have caused trouble, well before then (as an Alexandrian author will have known).
27 Cf. the reference to Epicurus’ garden at Heliodorus 1.16.5, in a romance set in the early classical period.
mid-first century CE, and specifically to 47 CE, on the basis of a claimed sighting of the phoenix and a war between Byzantium and Thrace. It is unlikely that Achilles was aiming at this level of historical precision. There is, however, one passage in L&C in which direct reference is made to the culture of the contemporary world. At 2.35.3, Clitophon claims that love for males is fashionable ‘these days’ (νῦν). Pederasty was of course commonly practised throughout Greek antiquity, but in the Roman era it gained a particular public prominence in Hadrian’s reign, thanks to his celebrated romance with Antinous. Shortly after Antinous’ death in September 130, the Egyptian poet Pancrates wrote a famous hexameter poem commemorating a lion hunt in north Africa, and possibly Antinous’ subsequent drowning too. It is possible that Achilles, another Egyptian, captured this atmosphere of sorrow and commemoration in his depiction of the tragic deaths of two young male lovers in L&C (1.12–14, 2.34). Antinous died shortly after a hunt (the hunt and the death may have been linked by Pancrates); similarly, the boyfriend of Menelaus dies in a north African hunting accident. If these allusions are accepted, then a date of composition between 131 (after Antinous’ death) and 138 (when Hadrian himself died) is likeliest. The title of the work is uniformly transmitted as The matters concerning Leucippe and Clitophon (τὰ κατὰ Λευκίππην (οι -ης) καὶ Κλειτοφῶντα (οι -ῶντος)), and there is no need to suspect this. Some titles contained an additional topographical descriptor – thus Xenophon of Ephesus’ romance was called The Ephesian story of Anthia and Habrocomes, and that of Heliodorus The Ethiopian story of Charicleia and Theagenes – but such descriptors were not de rigueur. It is unnecessary, therefore, to hypothesise

29 Baker 2018: 59–61 argues for other Hadrianioc allusions, in the peacock (1.16) and phoenix (3.25.1–6) episodes.
30 Fragments of the poem survive (GDRK 51–4); see further Whitmarsh 2018a on the attribution of the papyrus.
31 These episodes also allude to the death of Hyperanthes in Xenophon of Ephesus (see nn.).
32 Again there is a literary model here, in the form of the death of Atys in Herodotus 1 (2.33–41n.).
33 For more details apparently drawn from contemporary life, see further Section 2(a).
34 See n. 1 on the Suda’s ‘other erotic matters’ (καὶ ἄλλα ἱρωτικά), probably not part of the formal title (but the line between formal title and description of contents was not always clearly drawn).
35 This paragraph as a whole rests upon Whitmarsh 2005a and 2013: 36, with n. 4.
an additional, now-lost element to the title such as ‘Phoenician matters’ (Φοινικικά). These ‘titles’ were, however, not fixed as they are for modern novels, since their primary function was merely to identify genre and content; and we do thus find variation and compression in ancient and Byzantine references to the titles of romances.

In sum, the evidence – such as it is – suggests that Achilles was a non-Christian Alexandrian, possibly the son of a Roman called Tatius; his romance The matters concerning Leucippe and Clitophon was probably composed in the first half of second century, perhaps at some point between 131 and 138 CE.

The romances were almost certainly designed to be accessed in the form of written texts. What little we know about the readers of these texts we must deduce either from the quality of the extant papyri or from the demands placed on readers by the texts themselves. Nothing suggests that these texts (with the possible exception of Xenophon of Ephesus’ A&H) were works of pulp fiction. For all its erotic daring and thrilling, pacy narrative, L&C is composed in sophisticated Greek (Section 4(d)) and laced with echoes, sometimes recondite, of earlier literature (Section 4(a)). Its central characters are wealthy, literate property-owners. This does not per se rule out a sub-elite readership, particularly if we bear in mind the possibility (which, given our current state of knowledge, is all it can be) of mediaeval-style ‘reading circles’. One does not need to grasp every allusion to enjoy a work of narrative fiction, and one does not need to be wealthy to enjoy a story about the wealthy. It remains likeliest, however, that L&C, along with other romances, was read primarily by the educated elite, who had the money to own books and the leisure to peruse them – as, indeed, we find Clitophon doing at 1.6.6.

As for the gender of the readership, we have few indications. Brigitte Egger has argued that the genre’s concentration on strong female characters may have appealed to women, a greater proportion of whom were literate in the early Roman Empire than at any earlier time. The Wonders beyond Thule of Antonius Diogenes was addressed to a female reader (the author’s sister Isidora), as are several of Plutarch’s works. When it comes to L&C, the only evidence we have is internal to the text, and that

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56 As does Henrichs 1972: 11.
57 O’Sullivan 1995, however, argues that Xenophon of Ephesus’ romance was originally an oral text.
60 Phot. Bibl. cod. 166 (111a) = p. 127 S–W.
61 The Virtues of Women and Isis and Osiris are addressed to a friend, Clea. The Consolation is addressed to his wife.
largely discourages any gynocentric hypothesis: this is a largely male-orientated narrative, in which women are the objects rather than the subjects of desire (in contrast to Chariton’s *Call.* romance in particular, which places its heroine at the centre of the action).⁴² Even so, it seems prima facie likely that Achilles anticipated at least some female readers: these may have enjoyed his romance ironically, as an exposé of the protocols of female silencing and the hypocrisies of sexual double standards (Section 6(a)).

Finally, we should note the intriguing possibility that the romances, among them *L&C*, may have been performed as mimes (a form of expressive dance that was hugely popular in Roman times).⁴³ Elisa Mignogna in particular has emphasised the parallels between mime plots and several episodes from the later books of *L&C*, and argued that one papyrus may contain the remnants of a Leucippe mime.⁴⁴

2 ACHILLES AND HIS LITERARY CONTEXT

(a) *L&C* and the Greek Novel

*L&C* belongs to a genre that modern scholars call ‘the Greek novel’ or ‘romance’.⁴⁵ In what follows, I use the label ‘novel’ for any work of ancient prose fiction, and ‘romance’ for the subset constituted by the five fully extant heterosexual narratives centred on young, mutual love, adventure and marriage: Xenophon of Ephesus’ *A&H*, Chariton’s *The matters concerning Callirhoe* (*Call.*), Achilles’ *L&C*, Longus’ *The Matters concerning Daphnis and Chloe* (*D&C*), and Heliodorus’ *Charicleia* and *Theagenes* (*Ch&Th*). There is also a sizeable and growing corpus of fragments of novels from the imperial era (although how many of the texts from which these derive can be included within the narrower band of ‘romances’ we cannot be entirely sure).⁴⁶ The romances of the imperial era built upon literary foundations laid in classical and Hellenistic times, when there began to emerge stories of love and adventure that typically focused on lovers from different ethnic backgrounds, and indeed combined different cultural traditions of story-telling.⁴⁷ The imperial

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⁴³ Webb 2013. The evidence is strongest for the now-fragmentary *Metiochus and Parthenope* see Luc. *De salt.* 2, 54; Pseudologist. 25.
⁴⁴ Mignogna 1996a, 1996b.
⁴⁵ For introductory orientation see Schmeling 2003 (1996); Whitmarsh 2008; Cueva and Byrne 2014.
⁴⁶ S–W, now supplemented by *P.Oxy.* 4760–2, 4811, 4945, 5262–3.
⁴⁷ Whitmarsh 2018c.
romances, however, tended to focus on lovers from (approximately) the same community. To refer to the romance as a ‘genre’ risks flattening out both the differences between the romances themselves (A&H, for example, is the only subliterary text; D&C is a pastoral romance) and the connections between them and other contemporary texts. Nevertheless, the subject-matter shared between the romances (including their titling conventions: see previous section), their intertextual references to one another, and particularly their artful manipulations of readerly expectations born of experience with preceding romances, all collectively suggest the gradual, cumulative emergence of a sense (however non-prescriptive) of a genre. Achilles exploits in particular the so-called Scheintod (‘false death’) motif, which is central to Call. (the plot of which is propelled by the jealous Chaereas, who in an impassioned act of domestic abuse kicks Callirhoe seemingly to death). In L&C, Clitophon mistakenly believes Leucippe to be dead on three separate occasions.

Achilles’ primary romance model is Xenophon of Ephesus (Section 4(a)). In Books 1–2, Xen. supplies one particularly significant precedent, in the form of Hippothous’ tragic tale of his love for Hyperanthes (A&H 3.1–2). This supplies Achilles with two features: (1) ‘first-person’ narrative (sometimes called ‘homodiegesis’ or ‘ego-narrative’: Section 4(c)) and (2) a doomed ‘homosexual’ plot. Both are central to L&C. L&C is narrated in the first person throughout: in the opening section (1.1–2) an unidentified frame-narrator tells of his shipwreck in Sidon and his meeting with Clitophon; he then reports Clitophon’s telling of his own story. First-person narration is Achilles’ major innovation within the tradition, allowing him to generate an ironic distance from his protagonist and his plot. It also allows him to explore the subjectivity of desire much more closely: this is a romance about what it feels like to be in love. Achilles displays a sustained and (up to a point) serious interest in the psychology and physiology of sexual desire, including homoerotic desire; indeed, the debate that closes Book 2 offers arguably the most sustained theorising of sexual pleasure – female and male, hetero- and homoerotic – to survive from antiquity (including by some distance the most extensive and enthusiastic treatment in Greek literature of female orgasm). Relative to his primary competitors in the field of romance, Xenophon of Ephesus and Chariton, Achilles is not only more playful and oblique; he is also more visceral, more emotional, more sexual.

48 Morales 2009.
50 3.15, 5.7, 7.3–4.
Achilles innovates in other ways too. Xenophon of Ephesus and Chariton both have their young lovers meet near the start of the plot, and marry; their adventures then separate them, before the happy reunion at the end. Though they face challenges and difficult decisions, the lovers in both novels are fundamentally virtuous throughout. In L&C, by contrast, the lovers elope together before getting married at the end (a pattern emulated by Longus (if he is later than Achilles) and Heliodorus). Although they do not have sex in the course of the romance, it is not (initially) for want of trying; Clitophon gives up on σωφροσύνη (self-control) early on (1.5.7), and has seemingly little difficulty in persuading Leucippe to admit him into her bedroom (2.19.2) – even if they are interrupted by Leucippe’s mother before anything happens. Once they have escaped the household, it is only the intervention of Aphrodite in a dream that keeps them from consummating their love (4.1.3–8). The romance protocols of sexual virtue established by Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus are thus stretched to the very limit. Not only is this a romance that comes perilously close to sacrificing matrimonial ideals for sexual pleasure; it is also, from the parents’ point of view, a story of criminal ἁρπαγή, of the illicit abduction of a female (Section 6(a)). From the adult perspective, there is little to separate Clitophon from the dastardly Callisthenes, who abducts Clitophon’s sister Calligone (2.15–18). The narrative of L&C, therefore, has a dangerous, subversive edge that its predecessors lack. At the same time, it is antiquity’s first major celebration of mutual teenage love as independent of (and indeed for much of the romance opposed to) parental will. It is thus the first great critique in the Greek tradition of the practice of arranged marriage (Musaeus’ Hero and Leander, which draws heavily on L&C, is the second).

Xenophon of Ephesus’ A&H and Chariton’s Call. are both, fundamentally, stories about the Greek city. Their lovers both hail from the highest echelons within the same polis (Ephesus and Syracuse respectively). Their marriages are celebrated with fanfare by the citizen bodies; and their ultimate returns home are seen (particularly in Call.) as a cause for joyous celebration among the citizenry. L&C, by contrast, is set in the city of Tyre on the Phoenician coast (modern Lebanon). In Achilles’ day the Phoenician cities had been culturally Hellenised, but they retained a strong sense of ethnic distinctness; and L&C presents a Tyre that preserves at the very least a patina of its archaic Semitic culture, and perhaps rather more than that (Section 6(c)). There is, however, no sign of any political structure whatsoever at Tyre: events take place entirely within the household, and all the dynamics are interfamilial. This is a romance not about collective identity within the polis, but about individual psychology and family relationships.
Another striking difference between Achilles and his predecessors is the literary compendiousness of *L&C*. This is a text that gestures towards a worldview, albeit the worldview of a very distinctive narrator. Whereas the narratives of Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus follow the events of the plot in linear fashion with little digression (except, in Xenophon of Ephesus, to fill in the backstories of certain characters), Achilles offers us a kaleidoscopic portrait of human and animal life. Within Books 1–2 alone we encounter art criticism, theological, philosophical and psychological theorising, exposition of mythology, both traditional Greek and (what is presented as) Tyrian, excursuses on natural history, a digression on aquatic marvels, a discussion of breeds of cows, a pair of fables (perhaps of Achilles' own invention) and the debate on 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' love that closes Book 2. Clitophon and his companions love to expatiate: sometimes for their own calculated reasons (e.g. the seductive stories Clitophon tells in the presence of Leucippe at 1.16–19), sometimes so that Achilles can fill out and enrich the themes underlying the narrative (e.g. the opening ecphrasis of Europa), but sometimes, apparently, simply for the joy of a good anecdote (e.g. Chaerephon's inconsequential musings at 2.14.7–10).

'Parody' is not quite the right word to capture Achilles' complex relationship to his predecessors. *L&C* is a witty, oblique and playful text, with moments of comedy: for example, when Clitophon describes the laments over the death of Charicles as 'a threnodic competition between father and lover' (1.14.1), or the episode in which Leucippe sneaks up on him as he is engaging in a wrought internal dialogue (2.6.1). We also encounter instances of self-reflexive awareness of the romance's status as a romance (1.3.3n., 1.5.6n., 1.6.6n., 2.34.1n.). But it is not a primarily metaliterary work like Lucian's *True Stories*, a text that is explicitly designed to mock predecessors. Achilles' paradoxical work is both heavily literary and designed to speak to an aspect of human sexual life that had no real outlet for expression in existing literature. It is arguably the first articulation of the pressures and pains of teenage sexual awakening in world literature. The emphasis is primarily – given the identity of the narrator – upon the male Clitophon, who sees his erotic urges as necessarily conflicting with his father's wishes for him (1.11.3). But arguably the most emotionally powerful episode in Books 1 and 2 (precisely because of its unusualness in an otherwise egocentric narrative) is 2.29–30, where we find out (if Clitophon is reporting accurately) about the cares and anxieties that play upon Leucippe during her tussles with her mother.

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52 Möllendorff 2000.