CONTEMPORARY ELEMENTS IN ACHILLES TATTIUS'S
LEUCIPPE AND CLITOPHON

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ABSTRACT

The dramatic context in which the events in Achilles Tatius's Leucippe and Clitophon take place is vague. At 4.11 there is a reference to 'the satrap of Egypt' but this Persian title was used by Greek writers of the 2nd century to refer to the governors of Roman provinces and so it is unclear whether Achilles Tatius imagines a world under the control of Persia or Rome. However, since Achilles Tatius lived at the height of Roman power in Egypt (the 2nd century) it is likely that he would have been familiar with Roman ways, and of all the novelists who have survived from antiquity, his fiction resembles Petronius's Satyrion most closely. This article investigates traces of contemporary Roman culture in Leucippe and Clitophon such as the linguistic idiom of the work, the descriptions of paintings, the account of the Roman army in action, the operation of the law, and the narrative of the burial of the phoenix.

Introduction

The author whom we know as Achilles Tatius is an enigma. His first name, Achilles, identifies him as a Greek, and his evident interest in Alexandria (cf. 5.1) suggests that he was a Greek living in Egypt. However, his second name, Tattus or Statius, is probably Roman.1 The dramatic date of his novel is supposedly the time of Persian rule in Egypt (between 410 and 323 BC), as there is a reference to the Persian satrap (4.11.1) and the 'royal family' (7.12.1). This is also certainly the case in Heliodoros's Aethiopica—a novel that shows many similarities to Leucippe and Clitophon. However, the Persian setting is not consistently maintained in Leucippe and Clitophon, and, since

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1 For a discussion of the identity of Achilles Tatius, see Plepelits 1996:387-416. The name Statius occurs frequently in Latin in both Republican and Imperial times (cf. Cic. Tusc. 1.30; Sen. 25; Att. 5.1.3; 9.8.1; 15.19.2; 15.21.1; Gellius, NA 4.20.11-13). Titus Tatius was, of course, the name of the ancient king of Rome, but this name does not recur. Some argue that Tatius refers to the Egyptian god, Tat (Thoth). The Suda gives his name as Statius.
Achilles Tatius lived at the height of Roman power in Egypt (the 2nd century), it is likely that he would have been familiar with Roman ways. Of all the novelists who have survived from antiquity, his fiction resembles Petronius’s *Satyricon* most closely. This article investigates possible traces of contemporary Roman life in his narrative.

The language of Achilles Tatius

Achilles probably knew Latin and at times his Greek uses Latin idioms, although this conclusion cannot be drawn with a high degree of certainty. For example, at 3.18.5 Citophon believes that the *boukoloi* have sacrificed Leucippe, eaten parts of her flesh in a purificatory ritual, and consigned her body to a coffin. However, his Egyptian friend, Menelaus, after invoking the powers of Hecate, raps on the coffin lid and Leucippe emerges from the coffin alive. Citophon is understandably confused, and exclaims *τοιούτοι* είμι; which appears to be a calque on the Latin expression *ubi gentium sum?* The expression *πού* γίς *είμι* is attested in Sophocles (OT 108), but the idiom *πού* γίς *είμι* is rare in Greek, whereas the Latin phrase *ubi gentium sum?* (‘Where on earth am I?’) is much more common (cf. e.g. Apul. Ap. 59; Cic. Ver. 2.5.143; Plaut. *Mil. Glor.* 1379). It is thus possible that Achilles Tatius was bilingual and that his language was influenced to some extent by Latin. Another instance of this linguistic interference is the use of the periphrastic pluperfect passive *ήμεν* δεδεμένοι (*we had been bound*, 3.10.1), where the imperfect of *είμι* and a perfect passive participle have been used rather than the more Classical form *έδεδεμένα*. Another clear example can be found at 8.12.4: *ήμεν* κεχωρισμένοι (*they had been separated*). Then there is also 1.1.7 (with the verb *ήμεν* understood) στέφανοι περί τοίς μετώποις δεδεμένοι κόμαι κατά τάν ὄμων λευκέναι τὸ κέλευς ἀπαν γεγυμωμέναι ... (*wreaths had been bound around their temples; their hair had been let down over their shoulders; their legs were quite bare*). The process of replacing the perfect and pluperfect passive forms had already begun in Classical Greek and later accelerated in the Hellenistic period. However, the influence of

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2 All dates are AD unless otherwise stated.
3 For the date of Achilles Tatius, see the discussion in Plepelits 1996:300.
4 See, for example, Morgan 2007:105-20, and the discussion below.
5 The manuscripts have *ποι* rather than *πού* here but I follow Jacobs’s emendation to *πού*. The difficulty with *ποι* is that its meaning (‘whether’) requires a verb of motion. This could be supplied by reading *είμι* (‘I shall go’), but this would produce the meaning ‘Where on earth will I go to?’, which does not make good sense in the present context.
Latin may at least have encouraged this trend. Latin was a marginal language in Egypt, but one that was nevertheless important as the language of the ruling class. Greek was no doubt the lingua franca, but in Egypt Latin occupied a 'super-high' status as a language of power. While it may not have been in any sense the official language of the army, it was certainly important in the military sphere, where it also had 'super-high' status and was regularly learned by new recruits.

**Military tactics in *Leucippe and Clitophon***

The revolt of the **boukoloi** in *Leucippe and Clitophon* is in itself an indication that the novel is set at a time of increased brigandage in the 2nd century of the Roman Empire. Achilles appears to refer to the Roman army at 3.13, where the **boukoloi** are attacked by a force of soldiers. The narrator, Clitophon, describes this force as a φάλαγξ στρατιωτική, πάντες ὅπλαται (‘a military formation, all heavily armed’). Although the language is quite vague here, this could be the Greek way of describing Roman legionaries. What is unusual here is that Clitophon describes the force as ‘all heavily armed’, whereas later it becomes apparent that in fact it consists of both heavy- and light-armed troops. The number of soldiers is given as 50, which is less than the usual 80 men in a century at the time of the 2nd century, but these could have been a detachment of half a century. However, they carry ‘shields down to their feet’, which seems to clinch the identification of these men as Romans, since the Roman legions bore a full-length scutum, whereas Persian soldiers carried a round shield. The tactics too, are reminiscent of the Roman use of light-armed troops who soften up the enemy before the main assault by the legionaries (3.13.4). A further detail concerns the summoning of the army doctor in an attempt to cure the deranged Leucippe (4.10.2). Under the Roman Empire especially, the emperors took care to assign doctors to their

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6 Cf. Horrocks 1997:71-79, esp. 77; for an in-depth study with an extensive bibliography, see Rochette 1997: passim, esp. 118-26 (Egypt).
8 The similarities between the **boukoloi** in Achilles Tatius and in Dio Cassius (71.4) have been extensively discussed by Alston 1998:129-54 and will not be rehearsed here, except to say that, given the realistic detail in his description of these rebels, Achilles Tatius must have been aware of the incident, which I take, pace the extreme view of Winkler 1980:176, as historical.
9 The Roman army played an important role in suppressing revolts in Egypt. For this see Alston 1995:74-79; Davies 1989:175-86. On Greek terms for Roman institutions, see Mason 1974:97.
10 On Roman military tactics, see Webster 1985:231-34.
The picture becomes more convincing when it emerges that Leucippe and Clitophon are to be billeted in a nearby Egyptian village (4.1). This practice was common in Egypt under the Roman Empire and an inscription by Germanicus Caesar dating to AD 19 is extant in which this practice is condemned. Extortion and corruption by Roman soldiers were also prevalent, and in 4.13.4 the ambassadors of the boukoloi offer the ‘general’ a massive bribe of 100 talents of silver (far in excess of amounts that are attested for paying off Roman soldiers in the historical record). Elsewhere the general offers Menelaus payment in gold coins (the favoured method of paying Roman troops) for securing the favours of Leucippe (4.6.2).

**Leucippe and Clitophon and Petronius’s Satyricon**

According to Anderson (1988:190-93), of all the ancient novels Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon* ‘stands closest to Petronius’ in respect of the ‘self-indulgent rhetoric and sexual opportunism’ (192). In particular, Anderson noted the character of Satyrus, who, like the clever slave of New Comedy, aids his master in his love-affair with Leucippe. Satyrus’s name alludes to his role as a procurer. Not only does he arrange for Clitophon to gain access to Leucippe’s bedroom, but he also invents a device to rescue her from being sacrificed by the boukoloi, and acts as go-between in Melite’s erotic infatuation with Clitophon. Thus Anderson concludes that *Leucippe and Clitophon* belongs to a sub-genre of satyr tales or *Satyricon*. More recently, Morgan, has stated (2007:111) that ‘parallels of form, content, and ethos between the two works are mutually illuminating and interpretatively suggestive’, although, due to the fragmentary nature of the *Satyricon*, he views any attempt to prove a direct connection between the two works as ‘futile’. There are, nevertheless, a number of close and specific resemblances between Petronius and Achilles Tatius that deserve mention. These are: the introductory framework of both novels, the storm scenes, the widow of Ephesus motif, and the concealment of money.

In Petronius (§83), Encolpius comes to a picture gallery where he sees paintings by Zeuxis, Protogenes and Apelles. The depiction of Ganymede and Hylas causes him to exclaim: ‘So even the gods feel love’ (*Ergo amor etiam deos tangit*). His comment attracts the attention of Eumolpus, who tells him the sordid joke about the Pergamene boy. So, too, the primary narrator in

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11 See Webster 1985:257-64, esp. the bibliographical n. 4, p. 258; Davies 1989:209-36, esp. 209.

12 On extortion by the Roman army, see Campbell 1984:243-63, esp. 249.
*Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.1) sees a painting of Europa and the bull in a temple in Sidon and exclaims: 'Look how the imp (Cupid) controls earth and sea and sky', which causes a young man standing nearby to say that he too had suffered at the hands of Love. This young man turns out to be Clitophon and his story is the main narrative of the novel. Thus both works show a similar narrative technique, known as ego-narrative, in which the story is expounded not in the third person by an omniscient narrator, but by a young man who takes part in the action himself in the first person. Moreover, this technique has a similar effect in both works – the ironic portrayal of the ego-narrator as weak, naïve, gullible and selfish. He is both defined by the narrative and defines himself through his narration. Both of these texts incidentally have an earlier hypotext in the speech of Perseus in a fragment of Euripides's play *Andromeda* (fr. 136.1), where the hero says στὸ δ’ ὃ θεῶν τύραννε καλλίστων Ἐρως (‘Eros, you tyrant over both gods and men’). According to Lucian, *How to Write History* 1.1, this passage from the play was quoted endlessly by the people of Abdera after a particularly brilliant enactment of it by the famous tragic actor, Archelaus, just after the accession of Lysimachus in 322 BC. Lucian was a contemporary of Achilles Tatius and his anecdote shows how influential the classical authors were during the 2nd century of the Roman Empire. As it happens, the romantic story of Andromeda also plays an important part in Achilles's novel, as will be seen below.

In the storm scene in Petronius's *Satyricon* (114-15), Encolpius, Ascyton, Giton and Eumolpus find themselves aboard a ship owned by Lichas of Tarentum and his wife, Tryphaena. Giton and Encolpius had had sexual relationships with Tryphaena and Lichas, but had betrayed them. Consequently, once they were discovered, a violent argument broke out, which is eventually ended with a truce on the insistence of the helmsman. However, a storm gets up and everyone has to abandon ship. Tryphaena is put into a lifeboat, but Lichas drowns. Encolpius, Giton and Eumolpus find themselves wrecked on a beach. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Leucippe, Clitophon, Satyrus and Menelaus are wrecked off the coast of Egypt after a storm had suddenly overwhelmed their ship and the helmsman had given up the struggle to control the ship. The passengers and crew come to blows over the lifeboat. Leucippe and Clitophon are separated from the others, but survive by clinging onto the wreckage. There is a broad resemblance between the passage in Petronius and that in Achilles in respect of ship, lifeboat, helmsman and the fight during a storm, but the text of the *Satyricon* is

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13 For this see Conte 1996. Morgan 2007 makes a similar argument out for Achilles as a 'hidden author'.

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fragmentary at this point and the full extent of the relationship between the two cannot be recovered. The interaction between Encolpius, Lichas, Giton and Tryphaena (a kind of ménage à quatre) seems similar to that between Thersander, Leucippe, Melite and Clitophon.

The story of the widow of Ephesus in Petronius (§111-12) has a counterpart of sorts in Clitophon's encounter with Melite, a rich woman from Ephesus, whose husband, Thersander, is believed to have died at sea. This turns out not to be true, but the facts are known only after Clitophon has entered into an adulterous relationship with her. Clitophon escapes from Melite's house dressed as a woman, just as Encolpius and Giton are made up with women's false hair and eyelashes by Tryphaena's maids after they had shaved the hair off their heads to avoid detection by Lichas and Tryphaena. Cross-dressing is a feature of both narratives.

Finally, in Petronius (12-15), money sewn into a shirt becomes the subject of a comical incident in which Encolpius and As cylton contest the ownership of the shirt with an old woman, neglecting a rich robe that was offered in exchange. In Achilles, Satyrus conceals money in a belt and thus manages to keep it safe from the pirates who capture him (3.9.1; 4.17.6).

The close relationship between the Greek and Latin novels has recently been emphasised in a supplement of the Ancient Narrative with the title The Greek and the Roman Novel Parallel Readings. In this collection, Andrew Laird argues that the Satyricon should be dated to the 2nd century.14 This possibility suggests a much closer relationship between the work of Petronius and Achilles Tatius.15

The ecphrasis on Andromeda and South Italian painting

A further element that connects Achilles with the Roman world is found in the world of art. After landing at Pelusium, Leucippe and Clitophon visit the temple of Zeus Casius to offer thanks for their escape from death at sea. In a room at the rear of the temple they find a painting by Euanthes, about whom very little is otherwise known, depicting the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus. Clitophon describes how Andromeda, dressed in a silk robe, was chained to the rock of a natural hollow in a cliff. The monster was depicted with a spiny crest, huge jaws, a coiled tail, breaching the water in front of Andromeda. Perseus was descending from the sky, naked apart from his winged sandals, harpe and cap of invisibility, and carrying the head of

15 This close relationship is also possible, but rather less clear, if Jensson's argument that the Satyricon has a Greek antecedent is accepted (Jensson 2004).
Medusa. This representation of Andromeda chained to a cliff resembles the later tradition of the myth, rather than the earlier one in which the heroine is bound to posts. I have noted above the popularity of this romantic myth since the time of Euripides. However, Achilles’s description does not appear to be drawn from literature. Instead, it resembles paintings from Pompeii and Boscotrecase that have survived.

The Perseus/Andromeda myth was a favourite of ancient artists. It is found in both black- and red-figure vases, such as the Attic red-figure hydria in the British Museum from the 5th century (E169). These influenced the art of South Italy, as can be seen on a bell-crater in Basel (BS403). In both of these examples, Andromeda is tied to posts to await the arrival of the sea monster. However, it was in South Italy that artists began to innovate with the theme. These innovations can be seen in the increased realism that wall-paintings allowed. Specifically, these artists placed Andromeda on a cliff-face near the sea with Perseus arriving by air from Africa with the head of Medusa. The change is associated with the name of Euanthes on the basis of Achilles Tatius’s description of the painting. Art historians have dated the work of this painter to before 88 BC because the depiction of Mithridates VI on the Pergamon altar as Heracles rescuing Prometheus was based on the second half of a diptych, also painted by Euanthes, of which the Andromeda scene was the first half. This second half depicts Heracles coming to the aid of Prometheus, who, like Andromeda, was chained to a cliff-face in punishment for stealing fire from heaven. Mithridates chose to have himself painted as Heracles, since he viewed himself as an Alexander figure, bringing civilisation to the world.

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16 The story is also told by the Greek authors Pherecydes, FGH 1.75 fr. 26, Scholia in Apollonium 4.1091; FGH 1.75 fr. 26, Scholia in Apollonium 4.1515; FGH 1.76 fr. 26, Scholia in Apollonium 4.1090; Apollodorus 2.4.3; Hesiod, Scut. 216ff.; Theog. 270ff.; Simonides, fr. 543 PMG; Pindar, Pyth. 10.29; Lucian, Dial. Mar. 14; Pausanias 1.21.3; 1.22.4-6; 11.23.7; 2.16.3; 2.18.1; 2.20.7; 2.21.5,6; 2.23.7; 4.35.9; 8.47.5; 9.34.2; Athenaeus 5.221; Strabo 10.5.10; 16.2.28; Aelian, NA 3.37; Josephus, BJ 3.9.3, 3.419, 3.421; Ps.-Eratosthenes, Katasterismi 15ff.; Heliodorus 4.8, and John of Antioch, FGH 4.539, fr. 1, 8; 4.544; fr. 6, 18. There are also, however, Latin sources that mention this story: particularly Propertius 3.22, 3.29; Ovid, Met. 4.663; and Pliny, HN 5.69.

17 For literary discussions of this scene see Bartsch 1989:55-56; Goldhill 1995:72; Morales 2004:174-76.

18 For the Boscotrecase painting see Von Blanckenhagen & Alexander 1990.


20 See Bieber 1955:122, and n. 82.

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There is no definite indication of where Euanthes worked, as the painting that Achilles describes may have been a copy of the original. However, the centre of innovation is likely to have been in South Italy, because of the large number of paintings of the myth that have been found there. These have been analysed by Phillips (1968:1-23), who groups them into five categories, each of which concerns a different stage of the myth. The first is represented by the painting found in the villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscoreale (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), which probably inspired two other paintings in Pompeii, one from the House of the Sacerdos Amandus (1.7.7) and the second from House 7.15.2. The second type is exemplified in a painting from House 9.7.16, and three other Pompeian paintings. It is this type that resembles the painting described by Clitophon in Achilles Tatius, which Phillips (1968:72) suggests was done "at first hand".

It would appear as though the original Hellenistic diptych painted by Euanthes in the 1st century, was taken up in South Italy, especially in Pompeii and Boscoreale, and further developed. Phillips (1968:1-23) traces the innovations in the story of Andromeda to painters working in Magna Graecia, specifically in Tarentum. Thus the later painting described by Clitophon has its roots in South Italy and is one more Italian element in the work. The close resemblance between the painting described by Clitophon and the extant examples from Pompeii suggests that Achilles Tatius was, through his narrator, giving an account of an existing work of art, whether it existed in the temple at Mt. Casius or in Italy, although the likelihood is that it would have been the latter.

The legal context

The legal proceedings in Books 7 and 8 suggest that Roman law is being applied. The proceedings take place in Ephesus and the court should have been conducted according to Greek law. However, the charge brought against Clitophon and Melite by Thersander is one of adultery. It was, of course, Augustus Caesar who first made adultery a crime for which death was the penalty. Moreover, at 7.11.8, there is mention of a 'magistrate' (προεδρος, suggesting a Roman military official). At 7.12.1, a 'president of the judges' (ὁ προεδρος τῶν δικαστῶν), who belongs to the 'royal house', presides over proceedings. The term σύνεδρος, which is closely related to προεδρος, is listed by Mason in his lexicon of Greek terms for Roman

21 For the operation of Roman law in Chariton and the presence of the Roman Empire in that romance generally, see Schwarz (2003:375-94).
institutions (1974:80) as the Greek for the Latin term *senator*, which is the kind of person we would expect to serve as a judicial assessor in Ephesus. While membership of a ‘royal house’ is ostensibly a reference to the Persian governor, the Persians were not known for this kind of legal presidency. The officer could equally be a Roman legate, related to the Caesars and so ‘of the royal house’. This person had under him, according to the law, ‘assessors whom he had selected as experts in jurisprudence’, seemingly a clear reference to the *iurisprudentes* of Roman law. The expression used is έπιγνώμονας ἔλαμβανε τῆς γνώσεως. The term γνώμων is listed by Mason (1974:32) as the Greek for a legal formula, so έπιγνώμων would refer to a legal assessor, while γνώσεως could refer to the *ratio* or *sententia* of the judge. The reference to asylum for a female slave (7.13.3) is more difficult to assess, however. Westermann (1955:17-18) shows that this was a Greek and specifically a Hellenistic practice, and Buckland (1908:88) rejects the right of a Roman slave to testify for or against his or her master. However, the right of asylum and the right to give evidence are different, and Westermann (1955:105, referring to Von Woess and Schwartz 1923:212-15) provides evidence that the right of asylum did not disappear in Egypt under Roman rule.

The phoenix

My final example concerns the discussion of the arrival of the phoenix at Heliopolis in Egypt (3.25). Although Achilles depends to some extent on the account in Herodotus (2.73) – in his account of the red and gold colour of the bird and the ‘coffin’ made of myrrh, for example – there are features that suggest a contemporary, Roman, and political interpretation of the passage. Achilles is unique in comparing the phoenix with a peacock, to the detriment of the latter bird. Aelian states (13.18) that peacocks were bred in the palaces of Indian kings and that one was given to an Egyptian king, presumably one of the Ptolemies (11.33). Philostratus (Imag. 2.31.1) describes the throne of the king of Babylon as a ‘peacock throne’. The peacock was also a favourite of the Romans, particularly as food (cf. Thompson 1936:279) on the tables of the *patroni*. Achilles enhances the royal connotations of the phoenix, by describing its feathers as golden and purple – both royal colours – and by emphasising its honour, and by noting that it is crowned. Second, Achilles represents the phoenix with a radiate nimbus. The use of a nimbus to depict the phoenix was a syncretistic innovation dating to the beginning of the 2nd

22 Achilles Tatius is alone describing the feathers of the phoenix as purple rather than red.
century and can be seen first on a decorated liturgical garment from Saqqara of this date and on a Hadrianic coin of AD 118 (cf. Van den Broek 1972:237-38). The nimbus connects the bird with Helios. This detail dissociates the sacred bird from its Egyptian antecedents. The rays ascending from the head of the bird are a detail found also in Pliny (HN 10.2.3), where the pompous language is very similar to that of Achilles. Third, in his account of the escort of birds — a detail found also in the account of Tacitus (Ann. 6.28) — Achilles Tatius uses the term δορυφόρος, which was the Greek word for praetorians. Keitel (1999:429-42) discusses the political implications of the sighting of the phoenix in relation to the political situation in Rome at the end of the reign of Tiberius, and suggests that Tacitus includes the story to highlight the lack of piety of Gaius towards his predecessor. The phrase ἐολκευτε ὄρη ἀποθημαντι βασιλεῖ suggests that the bird resembles a king, or emperor, leaving this world for the next. In the phrase ὀφέλος αὐτῇ μετομελήν τεκρόν the word μετομελέν means ‘passing’ from life to death. This would have particular resonance in the context of the ‘deification’ of the Roman emperors. Lastly, the account of the funeral has unmistakable overtones of a transfer of power from the parent to the son, which can be seen also in Polybius’s description of the Roman laudatio funebris (6.53-54). Polybius describes how on such occasions an image of the dead man and his ancestors is brought out and put on public display. Masks of the dead person were also worn by the relatives who most closely resembled him in stature, gait and mannerisms, and in this dress they would hear the funeral speech. In Achilles, the filial phoenix positions himself in a prominent position and awaits the ‘attendants of the god’ and an Egyptian priest who produces a book from which the likeness of the phoenix to his father is recognised. After his identity has been verified, the son becomes a ‘funeral orator’ (ἐπιτάφιος σοφιστής) and delivers the funeral speech. The imperial context is not forgotten, however, because the bird, like the ruler, knows that his claim to be the divine, lawful successor will not be believed. Achilles himself is a sceptic, of course, and he turns the anecdote into satire by making the phoenix identify himself by his genitals (τὰ ἀπόθρητα φαίνει τοῦ σώματος). His account is nothing other than a pumpkinification of the sacred bird. It may be no accident that Pliny says (HN 10.2.5) that during the reign of Claudius, who, according to the Senecan satire, the Ἀποκολοφονίασ, 23 Cf. e.g. Mason 1974:39 and the references given there.
24 Van den Broek 1972:427-30 and Plate VI, lists the numerous Roman imperial coins of the 2nd century on which the bird appears.
26 For this sense of ἀποθημαντι, cf. Plate, Phld. 61e.
was the last emperor that Romans would expect to have become a god, a phoenix was brought to Rome. But everyone knew that it was false.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has offered some grounds for thinking that Achilles Tatius, while nominally setting his novel at the time of the Persian occupation of Egypt, actually had contemporary affairs in the 2nd century at the height of the Roman Empire in mind. As in the case of his supposed Atticism, which is not consistently upheld, the mask of the dramatic date in the Classical past often slips, and the reality of contemporary life in the 2nd century becomes visible. This makes Achilles a far more interesting writer than many of his rivals and makes more subtle readings of his text possible. It gives his writing an actuality and immediacy which is extremely rare in ancient literature, and allows the reader to glimpse that a more complex intelligence lies behind the façade of this ancient novel than is usually supposed.

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