



Achilles Tattius

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Life

Achilles Tattius (uh-KIHL-EEZ TAY-shee-uhs) was a sophisticated Greek writer from Alexandria, who lived during the second century c.e. Little is known about his life, but papyri show that his novel *Leukippe and Kleitophon* (English translation first published in 1597) was written by the late second century. The *Suda*, a Byzantine lexicon compiled at the end of the tenth century, identifies the author as a native of Alexandria and lists various other writings, now lost.

Leukippe and Kleitophon, a love story replete with adventures—torture, shipwrecks, pirates—is notable for its comic rewriting of romantic motifs, its psychological realism, and its resilient heroine. After a brief introduction, the novel, eight books long, is narrated entirely from the limited first-person perspective of the hero Kleitophon. Kleitophon seeks advice on how to woo, Leukippe runs away to spite her mother, and Kleitophon is unfaithful to his beloved. The novel includes descriptions of Alexandria and the lighthouse on the Pharos island. The *Suda* claims the author ended up a Christian and a bishop, although that is doubtful.

Influence

Achilles Tattius's novel is important not only as an early form of the genre but also for its information on contemporary tastes and attitudes, including learned digressions, a debate on heterosexual versus homosexual love, and a description of a painting of Europa. The novel has been criticized for its explicit sex and praised for its depictions of characters and emotions. It played an important role in the twelfth century Byzantine Greek revival of the novel. In the sixteenth century, translations began appearing in Latin and modern languages. This novel had influence on Elizabethan prose fiction (including the writings of [Robert Greene](#)) and in the seventeenth century was reworked by Pierre Du Ryer as a French tragicomedy.

Additional Resources

Bartsch, Shadi. *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tattius*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Hägg, Tomas. *The Novel in Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Konstan, David. *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Schmeling, Gareth, ed. *The Novel in the Ancient World*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996.

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