



Memnon in the Middle Ages: The Reception of a Homeric Hero

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Abstract

Memnon, the mythic king of Ethiopia killed by Achilles during the Trojan War, had a double or fused identity in classical antiquity: both Asian and African for Greek and Roman writers because of his parentage and because of the geographical indeterminacy of ‘Aithiopia’ and of ‘India’, but definitely black-skinned for Roman writers. How was this figure received in medieval texts and images? This paper tracks Memnon through three textual genres from the twelfth to the fifteenth century – commentaries on Ovid, catalogues of famous men, histories of the Trojan War – and charts the ways in which his classical identity was overlaid and transformed by pro-Trojan sentiment, chivalric heroization and Christian sacrificial thinking.

‘Fascinating and obscure’ is how one recent writer has characterized the archaic hero Memnon.¹ A king of Ethiopia who came to the aid of the besieged Trojans and was killed by Achilles, Memnon is obscure because his action in the Trojan War falls between the events of the *Iliad* and those of the *Odyssey*, which record him only briefly and in passing: remembered as the handsomest of men, the son of the goddess Aurora (the Dawn) and the killer of Antilochus (*Odyssey*, IV.188; XI.522). ‘King of the black Ethiopians’ for Hesiod (*Theogony*, 985), Memnon would have featured prominently in the Greek epic that bore his toponym, the *Aethiopsis*, but which is lost and survives only in summaries.² Memnon is fascinating because of the type and quality of images and texts in which he appears, and in their relation to changing ideas of race. Memnon’s fatal combat with Achilles was included on one of ‘the most important of monuments of classical antiquity’, the Siphnian Treasury

¹ M. Carvalho Abrantes, ‘A pietà de Mémnon e seu impacto na arte cristã’, *Boletim de estudos clássicos*, 64, 2019, pp. 112–27. I am grateful to the following for their comments on an earlier version of this article: Professors Fiona McHardy (who first suggested the topic), Kate Lowe, Trish Skinner and Mark Humphries.

² R. Drew Griffith, ‘The Origin of Memnon’, *Classical Antiquity*, 17, 1998, pp. 212–21, (213).

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at Delphi,³ and was a theme on archaic vases and in the poetry of Pindar, who characterizes him as ‘man-slaying’, ‘unfearing’, ‘fierce in his pride’ (*Isthmian*, 5.40–1 and 8.54). Also represented was his post-mortem fate: received into the arms of his grieving mother on archaic vases; his tomb at Troy the scene of a yearly fight among a flock of birds from Ethiopia according to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, X.74.37); the smoke and ashes from his funeral pyre transformed into birds in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (XIII.604–18); and his sonorous statue in Egypt noted by Pausanias (second-century *Description of Greece*, I.42.3) and later inscribed with Roman messages to Memnon as a deity.⁴ This paper investigates the equally obscure and equally fascinating fortune of Memnon in the central and later Middle Ages, when knowledge of these classical sources was limited yet Memnon eventually achieved a second coming as a savior and an exemplary figure; above all, it examines how the Ethiopian-ness of Memnon took on different hue, as Memnon was turned in some representations from black to white.⁵ How and why did that happen? The article will begin with a brief survey of the classical sources, before turning to its main focus on medieval reception.

Roman era sources are clear: Memnon was black-skinned. Virgil uses the single adjective ‘black’ to denote Memnon (‘nigri Memnonis arma’, *Aeneid*, I.489), as do Seneca, Ovid and other authors.⁶ Philostratus (third-century AD) was explicit: in describing an imagined painting of Memnon’s corpse being laid out for mourning, he discusses the exact black tone of Memnon’s skin.⁷ And when Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, XIII), narrating the transformation of Memnon’s ashes into birds, describes the black smoke and the black ashes turning into the dark-plumed birds called Memnonides (ruffs), the implication is clear. Virgil and Ovid were, of course, well known in the Middle Ages among students and scholars, though Philostratus was not, until the early sixteenth century.⁸ In this period, white skin is implied for Memnon, without explicit ascription, only by Quintus of Smyrna (third-century AD), in his *Posthomerica*, which filled the gap between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁹ Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*, II.22) allows both an Asian and an African Memnon, without implying any skin colour.

³ R. T. Neer, ‘Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi’, *Classical Antiquity*, 20, 2001, pp. 273–344, (288, 291).

⁴ P. A. Rosenmeyer, *The Language of Ruins: Greek and Latin Inscriptions on the Memnon Colossus*, Oxford, 2018.

⁵ For a parallel, see E. McGrath, ‘The Black Andromeda’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 55, 1972, pp. 1–18.

⁶ F. M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman World*, Cambridge MA, 1970, pp. 153, 309.

⁷ Philostratus, *Imagines*, transl. A. Fairbank, London, 1931, pp. 29–31. For Philostratus’s description, see Rosenmeyer, *Language of Ruins* (n. 4 above), pp. 12–14 (not mentioning skin colour).

⁸ M. Koortbojian and R. Webb, ‘Isabella d’Este’s Philostratos’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56, 1993, pp. 260–7; R. Crescenzo, *Peintures d’instruction: la postérité littéraire des Images de Philostrate en France de Blaise de Vigenère à l’époque classique*, Geneva, 1999, p. 59.

⁹ A. Gotia, ‘Light and Darkness in Quintus Smyrnaeus’ *Posthomerica* 2’, in *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic*, ed. M. Baumbach and S. Bär, Berlin, 2007, pp. 85–106 (87–8).

However, behind the Roman Memnon who was black, stood a Greek Memnon who was not. Although Martin Bernal argues that ‘Memnon’s being Ethiopian and hence black was central to the story [of the *Aithiopsis*]’,¹⁰ scholars have long argued that the Greek Memnon, until the Hellenistic period, was Asiatic not African, given the frequency among Greek writers of his association with Susa, the Persian capital, and the identity of his mother, Aurora, with the East.¹¹ His parentage pointed eastwards: his father was Trojan, his mother daily announced the rising sun. Memnon’s portrayal on archaic black-figure vases might seem to run counter to this: he is, to be sure, black as were most human figures in this medium, but the black body of the male hero was an artistic convention, with no reference to skin colour.¹² When he was accompanied on some vases by black African ‘squires’, their blackness obviously did refer to skin colour and served to signify Memnon’s African kingdom.¹³

However, the contrast between Greek and Roman Memnon is not so clear. More recently, scholars have shown the picture to be much more complicated. ‘Being Ethiopian’ and ‘being black’ are no longer seen as concomitants. Scholars now prefer to refer to the classical ‘Aithiopia’, a much less definite geographical area, and to argue that blackness was attributed to ‘Indians’ as well as Aithiopians. In an extended analysis of the ‘confusions’ and ‘interferences’ between Aithiopia and India in ancient texts, Pierre Schneider has identified various categories of confusion (parallels, transfers, assimilations), the main textual domains of confusion (more in geography and poetry than in history or ethnography) and the key chronological phases of confusion (especially the extension of ‘India’ in the Roman period to include eastern Africa). Most recently, Sarah Derbew has written of the ‘uneven convergences’ between ‘Aithiopia’ and ‘India’ already in Greek historiography and ethnography, and of the slipperiness of ‘chromatic markers’ in that relationship.¹⁴ Within this matrix, the myth of Memnon played an important role, maintaining the proximity of Aithiopia and India, and being loaded with ambivalence: African Aithiopian, but, as the son of Aurora, also an Aithiopian of the East.¹⁵ The authors of the Middle Ages received this confusion, placing ‘variable and multiple’ Ethiopians

¹⁰ M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, II, London, 1981, p. 259.

¹¹ R. Drews, ‘Aethiopian Memnon: African or Asiatic?’, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 112, 1969, pp. 191–2; T. Petit, ‘Amathousiens, Éthiopiens et Perses’, *Cahiers de Centre d’études chypriotes*, 28, 1998, pp. 73–86; Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity* (n. 6 above), p. 152; E. S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton, 2010, p. 179.

¹² Memnon has white skin: Quintus de Smyrne, *La suite d’Homère*, ed. and transl. F. Vian, 3 vols, Paris, 1963–9, I, p. 165 n. 5; P. Schneider, *L’Éthiopie e L’Inde: interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique*, Rome, 2004, p. 114 n. 4.

¹³ T. H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece*, London, 1991, p. 206. And see J. D. Beazley, *Attic Black-Figure Vase Painters*, Oxford, 1956, pp. 144, 149, 375, 390, 392, 564; I. Sforza, ‘La dea Eos e il trasporto di Memnone tra mito ed epica’, *Gaia*, 21, 2018, pp. 1–27.

¹⁴ S. Derbew, *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2022, pp. 14, 98–106.

¹⁵ Schneider, *L’Éthiopie e L’Inde* (n. 12 above), pp. 17–18, 113–16, 221–30, 232–4, 271–85, 388, 396–7.

on their maps, while also associating Ethiopia with Christian converts and saviors, which in turn influenced the reception of Memnon.¹⁶

Of the Greek depictions and allusions, the writers and artists of the Middle Ages in Western Europe knew little or nothing, and their knowledge of Memnon took as its origin the late antique narratives of the Trojan War by Dictys of Crete and Dares of Phrygia. Both texts claimed to be eye-witness accounts and were accepted as authentic, but they are of uncertain date and survive in copies datable to the fourth to the sixth centuries AD. Their prose narratives were credited as historical sources by medieval writers, in preference to the ‘lies’ of Homer, and they had the advantages, to a Christian readership, of reducing the ‘archaic heroism’, distancing the gods, and simplifying the style.¹⁷ They also provided alternative points of view: Dares was explicitly pro-Trojan, while Dictys presents as a Greek participant critical of the Greek commanders, especially Achilles. Of Memnon, Dictys tells only of his arrival at Troy, with a large army of ‘Indians and Ethiopians’ (thus synthesizing accounts of his origin)¹⁸ and of the collection of his bones by his sister, who took them to Phoenicia and then suddenly disappeared. It is Dares who reports that Memnon intervened to save the body of Troilus from being dragged by his killer Achilles and subsequently fought Achilles, falling victim to him, too.¹⁹

Other classical narratives of Troy mention Memnon only briefly if at all²⁰; but the essential elements of the Latin Memnon were alluded to in other texts: dark-skinned (*coloratus*) in one of Claudian’s panegyric poems of the late fourth century; black (*niger*) in Corippus’s sixth-century history of ‘Libyan’ wars; and associated with Persia by Cassiodorus (sixth-century again), with India by Claudian.²¹ One of the Vatican Mythographers of the Carolingian period still notes that Memnon was black.²²

Medieval narrators of the Trojan War built on the narrative in Dares and Dictys – of Memnon’s intervention, combat with Achilles and death – in order to create a dramatic confrontation. They were not the first to do so, as Quintus of Smyrna had already in late antiquity created a narrative of Memnon’s brutal killing of

¹⁶ S. Conklin Akbari, ‘Where is medieval Ethiopia? Mapping Ethiopia within Medieval Studies’, in *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. B. C. Keen, Los Angeles, 2019, pp. 82–93 (84).

¹⁷ S. Merkle, ‘The Truth and Nothing but the Truth: Dictys and Dares’, in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. G. Schmeling, Leiden, 1996, pp. 563–80.

¹⁸ Schneider, *L’Éthiopie e L’Inde* (n. 12 above), p. 116.

¹⁹ *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, transl. R. M. Frazer, Bloomington, 1966, pp. 89, 126–7, 159–60.

²⁰ Baebius Italicus, *Ilias latina*, ed. and transl. M. Scaffari, Bologna, 1982; *Excidium Troiae*, ed. E. Bagby Atwood and V. K. Whitaker, Cambridge MA, 1944, p. 11 (‘Memnone Ethiope’).

²¹ Claudius Claudianus, *Carmina*, ed. T. Birt (*MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, X), Berlin, 1892, pp. 198–9, ll. 265, 269: ‘Nigra coloratus produceret agmina Memnon ... Porus Alexandro, Memnon prostratus Achilli’; Corippus, *Johannidos seu de bellis libycis libri VIII*, in Corippus Africanus Grammaticus, *Libri qui supersunt*, ed. J. Partsch, (*MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, III), Berlin 1879, p. 7, l. 186: ‘niger Memnon Pelidae vulnere victus’; Cassiodorus Senator, *Variae*, ed. T. Mommsen, (*MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, XII), Berlin, 1894, p. 212: ‘Cyri Medorum regis domus, quam Memnon arte prodiga illigatis auro lapidibus fabricavit’. For *coloratus* as ‘dark-skinned’, see Schneider, *L’Éthiopie e L’Inde* (n. 12 above), p. 387.

²² *Mythografici vaticani I et II*, ed. P. Kulcsár, Turnhout, 1987, pp. 56–7: ‘niger autem’.

Antilochus, his seizure of Antilochus's armour and his arrogant verbal exchange with Achilles, in which Memnon is presented as a feral force: 'slaughtering the Argives like evil Fate itself', taking great delight in killing the Greeks from behind as he drove them down to the beach, and boastfully disparaging Achilles and predicting Achilles's death at his hands.²³ However, the tone and content of medieval stories of Memnon were entirely different, and the main responsibility for that lies in the complete reversal in attitudes to Achilles between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Partly owing to a political culture in which Trojan ancestry was prized and asserted by states and cities (Francio, Brutus, Antenor, etc.),²⁴ partly owing to the Ovidian diminishing of Achilles (lover not warrior), in medieval writings, he became the 'perfect anti-hero: impious, violent, rancorous',²⁵ 'violent, vindictive, mentally unstable',²⁶ or depicted in his youth and as a lover of women.²⁷ This negative reevaluation of Achilles – a fate he shared with other Greek leaders such as Ulysses²⁸ – in one sense generated a compensating positive reevaluation of his Ethiopian combatant.

In the second half of the twelfth century, in a significant 'Renaissance' moment, a group of clerics rewrote a set of classical foundation myths – Thebes, Troy, Rome – in the vernacular.²⁹ This re-emergence of Troy in medieval 'historical discourse' has been seen as a fundamental turning point, proposing Troy as the 'seedbed of European history' and embodying the claim of aristocracies and dynasties to the command of past time.³⁰ Among these new vernacular histories, the most influential was Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* of about 1160, much imitated, adapted and translated.³¹ Benoît drew on the accounts by Dares and Dictys but amplified them through the addition of descriptions of people and places.³² In this

²³ Quintus of Smyrna, *The Trojan Epic Posthomeric*, transl. A. James, Baltimore, 2004, pp. 29–39.

²⁴ For example, in France, Italy and England: C. Beaune, *Naissance de la nation France*, [Paris], 1985, pp. 19–54; C. E. Beneš, *Urban Legends: Civic Identity and the Classical Past in Northern Italy, 1250–1350*, University Park PA, 2011; J. Collard, 'Gender and Genealogy in English Illuminated Royal Genealogical Rolls from the Thirteenth Century', *Parergon*, 17, 2000, pp. 11–34.

²⁵ T. Zanon, 'Vulnerabili invulnerabilità: Achille nell'*Ovide moralisé* in versi (e in prosa)', in *Da Ovidio a Ovidio? L'Ovide moralisé en prose*, ed. A. M. Babbi, Verona, 2013, pp. 159–75 (160–3).

²⁶ L. Barbieri, 'Achille et Ulysse dans le Roman de Troie', *Vox romanica*, 67, 2008, pp. 57–83 (59–60).

²⁷ J. Miziotek, 'La storia di Achille in due cassoni fiorentini dell'ultimo Trecento', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, 41, 1997, pp. 33–55; E. B. Cantelupe, 'The Anonymous *Triumph of Venus* in the Louvre: An Early Italian Renaissance Example of Mythological Disguise', *Art Bulletin*, 44, 1962, pp. 238–41; P. F. Watson, *The Garden of Love in Tuscan Art of the Early Renaissance*, Philadelphia, 1979, pp. 80–6.

²⁸ G. Padoan, 'Ulisse "fandi ficator" e le vie della sapienza', *Studi danteschi*, 37, 1960, pp. 21–59.

²⁹ *Entre fiction et histoire: Troie et Rome au Moyen Age*, ed. E. Baumgartner and L. Harf-Lancner, Paris, 1997, pp. 12–13.

³⁰ F. Ingledew, 'The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*', *Speculum*, 69, 1994, pp. 665–704 (666, 674).

³¹ J. Solomon, 'The Vacillations of the Trojan Myth: Popularization and Classicization, Variation and Codification', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 14, 2007, pp. 481–533 (508–13, for list and phrasing).

³² C. Croizy-Naquet, 'Le portrait d'Hector dans le *Roman de Troie* de Benoît de Ste Maure', *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 14, 1996, pp. 63–71 (63–5).

text, Memnon appears in two sections: in the catalogue of Trojan allies and in his combat with Achilles. Benoît's portrait of Memnon celebrates his physical strength, his focus on action not words and his martial achievements:

King Memnon was noble and tall and a very agreeable knight. He was, according to Dares' work, broad shouldered, with solid chest, strong arms and a head of curly, auburn-coloured hair. His face was long³³ and fine featured, with large, confident-looking eyes. Not very merry or talkative, he was formidable in combat. He feared nothing, nor did anything frighten him. He succeeded in everything he undertook, delivering and confronting many a hard onslaught. He was remarkable and did remarkable things. His great prowess and his exceptional deeds will be recounted forever.³⁴

This is the first verbal portrait of Memnon since antiquity. There is no ambiguity about his colour: his hair is auburn, not black (though curls might be seen as stereotypically African). However, Benoît does seem to show some uncertainties about Memnon, his origin (between Asia and Africa) and his status (between history and myth). For although he names Memnon as the son of the sister of King Serses, 'from a country not too close to Ethiopia' – later named as Persia – he says that he came to Troy accompanied by nobles, knights and mounted archers with black skin: 'neither pitch nor ink was ever so black as they were'.³⁵ And though he thus places Memnon in history (Serses/Xerxes?), he also, through a mysterious sister (see below), allows Memnon to be related once again to myth.

In recounting Memnon's fatal fight with Achilles, Benoît uses at a micro level the narrative device deployed by Dictys to articulate the whole story of the Trojan War: ideas of affront and the repair of affront, expressed in speeches by the characters concerned.³⁶ Thus, Achilles, motivated by hatred and a desire for revenge against the Trojan prince, Troilus, instructs his men to find and surround Troilus, so that he can take vengeance for the humiliation, bloodshed and injury he had suffered at his hands. When they do this, Achilles pulls off Troilus's helmet, cuts off his head and then drags the body around the battlefield attached to his horse's tail. This episode is not mentioned in Homer but is clearly modelled on the death of Hector in Book XXII of the *Iliad*, which has the elements of the isolation of Hector in battle and the dragging of his body, roped to a chariot. It is this affront to Troilus to which Memnon responds: in a direct speech to Achilles, he labels him a 'scoundrel' and a

³³ 'Long' is the reading in the critical edition by L. Constans (*Le Roman de Troie par Benoît de Sainte Maure*, 6 vols, Paris, 1904–12, I, p. 287); but note the interesting, though probably accidental, variants: 'blanc' in a manuscript in Rome, written by scribes who did not know French very well, and 'brun/bron' in a manuscript in Paris containing many errors (*ibid.*, VI, pp. 16, 51, 88).

³⁴ *The Roman de Troie by Benoît de Sainte Maure*, transl. G. S. Burgess and D. Kelly, Cambridge, 2017, p. 108. Cf. Benoît de Ste Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed E. Baumgartner and F. Vieillard, Paris, 1999, p. 209, based on a manuscript in Milan.

³⁵ *The Roman de Troie* (n. 34 above), pp. 123, 140, 212–20, 250.

³⁶ M. Movellán Luis, 'Elements of Internal Cohesion in the *Ephemeris belli Troiani*: Historiography, Rhetoric and Genealogy', in *Revival and Revision of the Trojan Myth: Studies on Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius*, ed. G. Brescia et al., Zurich, 2018, pp. 129–48 (130).

‘brute’, condemns his action as a ‘savage’ and ‘insolent’ deed, ‘a flagrant atrocity’, which will be avenged.³⁷ Having issued his challenge, Memnon deals mighty blows to Achilles’s head, knocking him off his horse, and this allows the Trojans to recover Troilus’s body. Motivated now by deep hatred of Memnon, Achilles eventually returns to the fight, and his men again separate his opponent from any assistance, and Achilles ‘hacked him to pieces’. Memnon’s remains were buried alongside Troilus in a coffin of gold and silver. Later, his beautiful sister came and retrieved them and took them back to her own land, but she was never seen or heard of again: ‘she went away to her mother who was (I don’t know which) a goddess or a fairy’, comments Benoît.³⁸ Benoît allows this mythical element to fade into the intangible: he attributes the story to his ‘source’ (Dares) and also says that there are various opinions of what happened. If the sister stands in for Aurora, it shows how distant these ‘histories’ were from Ovid and Ovidian commentary: the goddess now appears as a nameless suffix to an uncertain story about Memnon’s remains, not as the main subject of a myth about the transformation of her son’s ashes.

Benoît’s *Roman de Troie* was later translated into Latin by the Sicilian Guido delle Colonne (finished 1287) and this version – ‘authoritative and prestigious’, ‘the text to draw on for knowledge of the Trojan War’ – went through many rewritings and translations into vernacular languages.³⁹ Guido follows Benoît in both describing Memnon’s body and character, and in narrating his battles. In his description, he makes two significant changes: Memnon’s hair was ‘golden-yellow’ (‘crinibus ... *flavis*’) and his eyes were ‘shining black’ (‘Oculorum ... eius orbes nigro fuerunt colore perlucidi’),⁴⁰ the latter perhaps suggesting awareness of classical Roman authors’ use of the term ‘black’, but restricting its potential scope to eyes alone. On the other hand, he eliminates the blacker-than-ink archers: cumulatively a double elision of black skin.⁴¹ His narrative of the encounter between Memnon and Achilles intensifies the rhetoric directed at Achilles, calling him a traitor and accusing him of cruelty and disparagement (dragging the body of a king’s son *as if* he was the basest of men).⁴² This provides an example of Guido’s treatment of the story of Troy: dramatic conflicts marked by emotionally charged speeches.⁴³ Later authors

³⁷ *The Roman de Troie* (n. 34 above), p. 304.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 405–6.

³⁹ G. Carlesso, ‘Note su alcune versioni della *Historia destructionis Troiae* di Guido delle Colonne in Italia nei secoli XIV–XV’, *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 42, 2014, pp. 291–310; ead., ‘Variazioni sulla *Historia destructionis Troiae* di Guido delle Colonne’, *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 45, 2017, pp. 299–346 (299); M. Petolletti, ‘Benzo d’Alessandria e le vicende della guerra troiana: appunti sulla diffusione della *Ephemeris belli troiani* di Ditti Cretese’, *Aevum*, 73, 1999, pp. 469–91 (472) (my translation, my emphasis). See also E. Gorra, *Testi inediti di storia Trojana*, Turin, 1887.

⁴⁰ Guido de Columnis, *Historia de destructionis Troiae*, ed. N. E. Green, Cambridge MA, 1976, p. 87. Cf. Joseph of Exeter, who has black blood spurting from Memnon’s wounds (‘niger emicat alte sanguis’): Joseph Iscanus, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. L. Gompf, Leiden, 1970, p. 189.

⁴¹ A prose Italian version of the *Roman de Troie*, composed in Siena in 1322 and praised by its editor for faithful and accurate translation, also omits the black archers: Binduccio dello Scelto, *Storia di Troia*, ed. G. Ricci, Parma, 2004, pp. xv–xvi, 204–5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 203–6.

⁴³ C. Croizy-Naquet, ‘L’*Historia destructionis Troiae* di Guido delle Colonne e sa première traduction française: aux origines d’un mystère profane’, in *Théâtre et révélation: donner à voir et à entendre au Moyen Age*, ed. C. Croizy-Naquet et al., Paris, 2017, pp. 353–69 (355).

and translators elaborate on this sequence of elements, multiplying the condemnations of Achilles' cruelty and treachery. 'Traitor, scorpion, serpent', is how John Lydgate's Memnon (1421, for the king of England) addresses Achilles, he used 'false engyn [trickery]', 'venom' and 'malice' in killing Troilus, and his abuse of the corpse was a 'cruel deed and ungentleness'.⁴⁴ Raoul Lefèvre's version (1464, for the duke of Burgundy) describes Achilles' action as 'felonious' (*felonneuse*), and his cruel killing of Memnon as inflicting 'grant martire' (that is, unnecessary torment).⁴⁵ These works consistently present Memnon as a valorous victim of dishonourable fighting: he intervenes to protect a noble corpse from degrading treatment; he is trapped by the bestial cunning of Achilles; he is the helpless victim of a treacherous desire for revenge. Like Benoît's heroes, so too Guido's 'fight like knights' and 'think like knights';⁴⁶ and the villains behave like negative copies, acting with cruelty, treachery and vindictiveness. This literary presentation had a clear impact on the treatment of Memnon in other genres.

On the one hand, Benoît's uncertainties about Memnon's origin and status are mirrored in another medieval genre where Memnon appears. Commentaries on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which are sometimes more focused on Aurora, naturally confine themselves to glossing the name Memnon and the circling and fighting birds.⁴⁷ To mention the major commentaries: one of the earliest by Arnulf of Orléans in the twelfth century additionally explains that Memnon 'is said to be' the son of Aurora 'because he was king of Ethiopia which is in the east towards the dawn',⁴⁸ a formulation that preserved the mythical Eastern Ethiopia, while also denying pagan maternity. Similar is the Vulgate Commentary, written in France in the mid-thirteenth century: 'Memnon was an Eastern king who came to the aid of the Trojans and one morning Achilles killed him. Aurora is said to be his mother because dawn rises in his realm which is in the East'.⁴⁹ The influential Vulgate commentary thus accepts the historicity of Memnon but is vague on the location of his kingdom (the name Ethiopia is avoided), and distances itself from belief in divine motherhood. Later commentators filled out these few lines, while sticking closely to their outline. Giovanni del Virgilio, who in general expands rather than

⁴⁴ Lydgate's *Troy Book*, ed. H. Bergen, London, 1906, p. 648.

⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 253: Raoul Lefèvre, *Recueil des histoires de Troie*, fol. 203^v (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9059501m>). See William Caxton's translation as *The Recuyell of the Histroyes of Troye*, ed. H. Oskar Summer, 2 vols, London, 1894, III, pp. 639–40, for this passage. The modern critical edition of Lefèvre contains only the first two books and stops with the death of Hercules; see M. Aeschbach, *Raoul Lefèvre – Le Recueil des histoires de Troyes*, Berne, 1987. For Lefèvre, see W. H. Forsyth, 'The Trojan War in Medieval Tapestries', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 14, 1955, pp. 76–82 (76–7).

⁴⁶ P. Logié, 'L'oubli d'Hésione ou le fatal aveuglement: le jeu du *tort* et du *droit* dans le Roman de Troie ed. Benoît de Ste Maure', *Moyen Age*, 108, 2002, pp. 235–52 (241).

⁴⁷ Thus, the earliest commentary of c. 1100; see *The Bavarian Commentary and Ovid*, ed. R. W. Böckerman, 2020, pp. 298–300.

⁴⁸ G. Ghisalberti, 'Arnolfo d'Orléans, un cultore di Ovidio nel secolo XII', *Memorie del Reale istituto lombardo di scienze e lettere*, 24, 1932, pp. 157–234 (226).

⁴⁹ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 1598, fol. 138^v: 'Memnon rex fuit orientalis pervenit in auxilium troianorum et quodam mane Achilles eum interfecit. Aurora dicitur mater illius quia oritur Aurora in regno illius qui est in oriente'. On the text, see F. T. Coulson, 'MSS of the Vulgate Commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: A Checklist', *Scriptorium*, 39, 1985, pp. 118–29.

allegorizes,⁵⁰ distinguishes between the historical ('it is true that he went into the army to aid the Trojans'), the figurative (the birds threw themselves on the pyre and were reborn from the ashes, 'and so it was said that they were born from Memnon') and the unbelievable ('that they go every year to Memnon's tomb, Augustine says is pagan').⁵¹ Distinguishing true 'history' from untrue 'fable' was part of the mission of these medieval interpreters of perilous classical texts: fable conceals and charms, whereas history commemorates great deeds, in John of Garland's formulation.⁵²

On the other hand, the chivalric Memnon, enhanced by Guido delle Colonne, is also evident in some late medieval biographical works, particularly catalogues of famous men. The genre owed much to the early humanist Petrarch,⁵³ and two of Petrarch's literary associates took his idea much further, participating in a popular medieval genre that disseminated 'exempla ... ethical lessons and exponents of virtue'.⁵⁴ Guglielmo da Pastrengo's ambitious, alphabetical dictionary of illustrious men, compiled in the mid-fourteenth century, has only a vague idea of Memnon, saying that his brother or father, 'as they say', founded Susa in Persia, and that birds from Egypt fly to his tomb in Troy every 5 years and tear each other to pieces.⁵⁵ What lessons or virtues Memnon could have transmitted here is not clear. Much fuller in its range of sources – he 'tried to collect all the available evidence' – was Domenico di Bandino's entry for Memnon in the 'great dictionary of world biography' that was his *De viris claris* of the later fourteenth century.⁵⁶ Again, the arrangement was alphabetical, the focus historical, the intention didactic.⁵⁷ Domenico insistently distances Memnon from myth. His two-page entry starts by clearing away all the 'poets' fables' about him being the son of Aurora, 'which I judge to

⁵⁰ J. B. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge MA, 1970, p. 122.

⁵¹ Giovanni del Virgilio, *Allegoriae librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*, Yale University Library online, fols 36^v-37^r (<https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/10923622>): 'verum est quod ivit in exercitum ut iuvaret troyanos ... dictum fuit quod [volucres] nate fuerant ex Memnone sed quod omni anno vadant ad sepulcrum Memnonis dicit Augustinus quod hoc est paganum'. See F. Ghisalberti, 'Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle "Metamorfofi"', *Giornale dantesco*, 34, 1931, pp. 1–110 (97).

⁵² Giovanni di Garlandia, *Integumenta Ovidii poemetto inedito del secolo XIII*, ed. F. Ghisalberti, Messina, 1933, pp. 39–40. This commentary on Ovid does not mention Memnon.

⁵³ E. H. Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch*, Chicago, 1961, pp. 18–19, 108; B. G. Kohl, 'Petrarch's Prefaces to *De viris illustribus*', *History and Theory*, 13, 1974, pp. 132–44; M. Aurigemma, 'Petarca e la storia: osservazioni sulle biografie del "De viris illustribus" da Adamo ad Ercole', in *Scrittura e società: studi in onore di Gaetano Mariani*, Rome, 1986, pp. 54–74.

⁵⁴ P. Baker, 'Introduction', in *Biography, Historiography and Modes of Philosophizing: The Tradition of Collective Biography in Early Modern Europe*, ed. id., Leiden, 2013, pp. 1–35 (5).

⁵⁵ Guglielmo da Pastrengo, *De viris illustribus et de originibus*, ed. G. Bottari, Padua, 1991, pp. xxxi–xxxv, 311, 346.

⁵⁶ A. T. Hankey, 'Domenico di Bandino of Arezzo and his "De viris claris"', PhD diss., London University, 1955, p. 1–2; ead., 'The Library of Domenico di Bandino', *Rinascimento*, 8, 1957, pp. 177–207 (206 for the quotation).

⁵⁷ Hankey, 'Domenico di Bandino' (n. 56 above), pp. 86–7.

be made-up' ('quod imo fictum arbitror'), 'because Ethiopia is located in the East towards the dawn'.⁵⁸ In order to give didactic substance to Memnon, Domenico dismisses Ovid and embraces Guido delle Colonne. He presents a historical Memnon – a 'knight of great strenuousness who did many deeds in the Trojan War worthy of memory'⁵⁹ – juxtaposing the accounts of Dictys and Dares, quoting Virgil without comment (an unusual inclusion), reading Ovid's 'fictions' metaphorically (the birds as the far-flying fame of a celebrated man) and ending with a quote from Guido delle Colonne on the mysterious sister who collected Memnon's ashes.

Another element in Benoît's narrative came to have an important late medieval development: his self-sacrificial intervention to retrieve the body of Troilus. This is clear in Christine de Pizan's handling of Memnon in her work of political/chivalric advice, the *Letter of the Goddess Othea to Hector*: not a history, not a commentary on Ovid, not a list of famous men, but a twofold interpretation, moral and allegorical, of her own didactic text. The *oeuvre* of Pizan (1365–1430) covered many genres, from biography to political poetry and feminist treatises. Her *Letter of the Goddess Othea* was in the genre of a 'courtesy book' (teaching morally good conduct) but unusual in taking the form of a letter,⁶⁰ with one hundred figures from classical sources – 'story moments or ... personages, pagan gods'⁶¹ – as examples of chivalric virtue or vice. Nearly one third of the chapters comment on characters from the Trojan War.⁶² 'Troy mattered to Christine. She knew that her aristocratic audience cared about the Trojan Wars'.⁶³ And in particular, Hector mattered to Christine: the Epistle is addressed to him, as to a pupil in chivalry, and it is his 'incompletely mastered' chivalry that she seeks to correct and improve, by exemplifying the 'knightli deedes' (to use the fifteenth-century translation) 'that be full necessarie to his wurthyness and the contrarie'.⁶⁴ She intended this to have contemporary impact: the text is addressed to Hector, but the work is dedicated to Louis, Duke of Orléans (and beyond him to the wider French and European upper nobility: that it reached them is attested by the number of extant copies and translations, which have led some to suggest that this was Pizan's most popular work).⁶⁵ The illustration of the Memnon chapter that accompanies a lavish manuscript copy, one that Pizan herself directed, even makes a direct political allusion to the assassination of Louis d'Orléans (brother of the king of France) in 1407: in the foreground a knight, presumably Memnon, is being prepared by his (white) squires for battle, but in the background

⁵⁸ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. Lat. 300: Domenico Bandini, *De viris claris*, fol. 275' (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Urb.lat.300): 'quia Ethiopia est versus auroram positam in oriente'.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 'multe strenuitatis miles plurima in troyano bello memoria digna egit'.

⁶⁰ S. L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa': Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*, Toronto, 1986, pp. 21–2.

⁶¹ R. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity*, Princeton, 1966, p. 34.

⁶² Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa'* (n. 60 above), pp. 5–6.

⁶³ L. J. Bray, 'Imagining the Masculine: Christine de Pizan's Hector, Prince of Troy', in *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. A. Shepard and S. D. Powell, Toronto, 2004, 133–48 (135).

⁶⁴ Christine de Pizan, *The Epistle of Othea*, transl. S. Scrope, ed. C. F. Bühler, London, 1970, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi; Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa'* (n. 60 above), p. 138.

another knight in armour and brandishing a sword is about to attack from behind an unarmed, unprotected man bearing a royal emblem on his clothing.⁶⁶ Indeed, the scene of Achilles and Memnon fighting for the headless body of Troilus seems to be common in the more generously illustrated manuscripts of Trojan War histories and romances, starting in the thirteenth century.⁶⁷ Christine's presentation of Memnon as the epitome of self-sacrificing loyalty is spread across her own verses, her moral gloss, concerned with 'preparing the Good Knight to enter the moral tournament of life',⁶⁸ and her allegorical interpretation. Her brief text presents 'Maymon' [sic] as 'your loyal cousin / who is your neighbour in your need / and loves you so much that you must love him / And in his need arm yourself'. Her gloss explains that Memnon, 'a very valiant knight' ('moult vaillant chevalier'), was Hector's cousin and wounded Achilles after he had treacherously killed him, 'and this is to be understood [to mean] that the prince or good knight who has good and true kin, however, small or poor they are, should love and support them'. Her allegory interprets Memnon, 'the loyal cousin', as 'God of Heaven, who has been so loyal a cousin to us that he took our humanity, which benefit we could not recompense'.⁶⁹ Christine's main source in the rest of this work was the *Ovide moralisé*,⁷⁰ but for Memnon she is closer to the Latin *Ovidius moralizatus* of Pierre Bersuire, written in two versions in the mid-fourteenth century,⁷¹ and notable for the inventiveness of its allegories.⁷² After picking up from earlier commentators the distinction between 'fable' and

⁶⁶ Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa'* (n. 60 above), pp. 119–20; London, British Library, MS Harley 4431, fol. 112r (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I11ID=28597>, consulted 9 Feb. 2022).

⁶⁷ See, e.g. H. Buchthal, *Historia Troiana: Studies in the History of Medieval Secular Illustration*, London, 1971, p. 10 and Pl. 3a for reference to Memnon in a thirteenth-century copy of the *Roman de Troie*. This repeats F. Saxl, 'The Troy Romance in French and Italian Art', in id., *Lectures*, 2 vols, London, 1957, I, p. 130 and Pl. 75a, even though the identification of Memnon is questionable: cf. E. Morrison, 'Linking Ancient Troy and Medieval France: illuminations of an Early Copy of the *Roman de Troie*', in *Medieval Manuscripts, their Makers and Users: A Special Issue of Viator in Honor of Richard and Mary Roux*, Turnhout, 2011, pp. 77–102 (85). For other representations of the Achilles-Memnon combat: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 22, 552, Raoul Lefèvre, *Recueil des histoires de Troie* (1495), fol. 265v (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10536284w>); S. L'Engle, 'Three Manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie*: Codicology, Pictorial Cycles and Patronage', in *Allen Mären ein Herr: Ritterliches Troja in illuminierten Handschriften*, ed. C. Cipollaro and M. V. Schwarz, Vienna, 2017, pp. 67–128 (124). My aim has not been to assemble a full catalogue.

⁶⁸ Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (n. 61 above), p. 40.

⁶⁹ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre d'Othea*, ed. G. Parussa, Geneva, 1999, pp. 250–1: 'Maymon, ton loyal cousin/ Qui a ton besoing t'est voisin/ Et tant t'aime, tu dois aimer/ Et pour son besoing toy armer. ... et est a entendre que tout prince et bon chevalier qui ait parent, quelque petit ou povre que il soit, bon et loyal, le doit amer et le doit porter en ses affaires ... Maymon, le loyal cousin, pouons entendre Dieu de paradis qui bien nous a esté loyal cousin de prendre nostre humanité, le quel benefice nous ne pourrions guerdonner'.

⁷⁰ J. L. Kellog, 'Transforming Ovid: The Metamorphosis of Female Authority', in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. M. Desmond, Minneapolis, 1998, pp. 181–94 (183). The *Ovide moralisé* tilts the narration towards Aurora and away from Memnon and allegorizes Aurora as Holy Church praying to God and the birds as sinners at the last judgement: "*Ovide moralisé*" *poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle*, ed. C. De Boer, 5 vols, Amsterdam, 1915–36, IV, pp. 422–8.

⁷¹ M. T. Kretschmer, 'L'*Ovidius moralizatus* de Pierre Bersuire: essai de mise au point', *Interfaces*, 3, 2016, pp. 221–44 (224–5).

⁷² Friedman, *Orpheus* (n. 50 above), p. 127.

'history', Bersuire advances a different spiritual meaning and interprets Memnon as Christ, Aurora as the Virgin Mary and the birds as crusaders who are bound to fight their way to Christ's tomb and to risk death for him. Those who are born from the dead body of Christ are encouraged in fatal combat by his example.⁷³ This was typical of Bersuire's approach to Ovid: he 'ceaselessly repeats, varies and recombines' figurative groups from Christian belief (Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Devil, Jews).⁷⁴ Writing for preachers, he 'transforms his work into a sermon handbook'.⁷⁵

Through these medieval retellings of Memnon's story, some rewritings of his identity are evident. These should not be seen as getting Memnon wrong, but rather as receiving Memnon differently. One aspect of this is a redefinition of his status: Guido delle Colonne has Memnon accompanying 'King Perses' from Ethiopia (translated as 'Perseus' by Caxton, suggesting a further confusion of Africa and Asia). The fourteenth-century sources also portray him more as a 'strenuous knight' than as a king. A more significant aspect is the definite preference for an Asiatic origin, and the elimination of an African one. For Benoît, he comes from Persia. The Vulgate Commentary on Ovid has Memnon as an 'Oriental' king. The late thirteenth-century *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* has 'King Memnon of Persia' ('le roi Menon de Perce'), and one Italian prose version of the *Roman de Troie* speaks repeatedly of Memnon and his Persian troops.⁷⁶ Both Pastrengo and Boccaccio make the link between Memnon and the construction of Susa, 'the famous city in Persia'.⁷⁷ Some authors (Arnulf, Domenico di Bandino) retained the classical mythic Ethiopia 'in the East towards the dawn'. Giovanni del Virgilio has Memnon reigning 'in Eastern Ethiopia'. Ethiopia was an ambiguous term: classical and medieval geographies denoted huge swathes of sub-Saharan Africa with this term,⁷⁸ but 'Ethiopian' was also confused with 'Indian' and 'Nubian' in medieval writings, as in ancient ones.⁷⁹ Of the many medieval terms for Africans, 'Ethiopian' was the one that most consistently meant 'black';⁸⁰ so Memnon's non-African provenance

⁷³ Peter Berchorius, *Reductorium morale, Liber XV, Cap. I, De formis figurisque deorum: Metamorphosis ovidiana moraliter a Magistro Thoma Walleyis ... explanata*, Utrecht, 1960, pp. 168–9: 'fideles milites et robusti qui ad sepulchrum eius debent ad praeliandum accedere et pro ipso se morti exponere'. 'Quod etiam de martyribus potest dici qui ex Christi corpore mortuo nasci dicuntur, pro eo quod inde exemplariter ad mortis praelium animantur'. I have not been able to consult D. Blume and C. Meier-Staubach, *Petrus Berchorius und der antike Mythos im 14. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 2021.

⁷⁴ Kretschmer, 'L'Ovidius moralizatus' (n. 71 above), pp. 231–2.

⁷⁵ K. J. Knoespel, *Narcissus and the Invention of Personal History*, New York, 1985, p. 56.

⁷⁶ London, British Library, Add. MS 15268, fol.120^r (http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_15268_fs001r); Binduccio, *Storia di Troia* (n. 41 above), pp. 638–41.

⁷⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and transl. J. Solomon, II, Cambridge MA, 2017, p. 23.

⁷⁸ *Eratosthenes' "Geography"*, ed. and transl. D. W. Roller, Princeton, 2010, pp. 123, 224; Strabo, *Geography*, XVII.II.1–3; *Il mappamondo di fra Mauro*, ed. T. Gasparrini Leporace, Venice, 1956, Pl. 17.

⁷⁹ C. Rouxpetel, "'Indiens, Éthiopiens et Nubiens" dans les récits de pèlerinage occidentaux: entre altérité constatée et altérité construite', *Annales d'Ethiopie*, 27, 2012, pp. 71–90.

⁸⁰ K. Lowe, 'Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 66, 2014, pp. 412–52 (416); Rouxpetel, ' "Indiens, Éthiopiens et Nubiens" ' (n. 79 above), pp. 76, 81. Cf. Ethiopians described as brown, and specifically not black: A. Kurt, 'The Search

allowed him once again to be depicted as white, as in illustrations to Christine de Pizan's *Epistle of Othea*,⁸¹ or in the Trojan War tapestries made in Tournai and now in Zamora (Spain).⁸² Few commentators or authors cited those well-known Roman authors who specified that Memnon was black. Indeed, the tapestries, part of a huge set (comprising 11 pieces and stretching over 100 m in total) woven in Tournai in the early 1470s and delivered to the duke of Burgundy, show Memnon in Asiatic costume; and though there are two black infantrymen (not archers) at the edge of the panel, it is difficult to argue that they relate to Memnon or recall his African origin, because they are positioned two scenes away from Memnon's fight with Achilles over the body of Troilus, and because similar black guards are to be found in other panels in the series (Achilles in his Tent, Paris's combat with Ajax).⁸³ Whether Memnon's men or not, pictorially these black squires seem to be examples of the new artistic motif of black servants portrayed often at the edges of the picture plane.⁸⁴

It must be admitted that skin colour almost entirely disappears from these medieval sources. Benoît and Guido imply whiteness through their colouring of Memnon's hair, but none of the texts is explicit about skin, only the images are. Even those texts that present Memnon most positively – his mother as Holy Church, himself as Christ – do not specify his skin colour as white. Is whiteness presumed here, and blackness avoided? Even in the few instances where blackness is suggested or implied – black eyes, black blood, black servants – there is no hint of negativity. So, either readers were aware of Latin sources describing Memnon as black and admitted him to the ranks of the virtuous 'other' (in line with St Maurice or the magus Balthasar or Saracen knights), or they envisaged him as white (like the good Saracen women in French *chansons*),⁸⁵ or they saw him as an exotic Asian.

Each of these readings should be considered as possible. All of them can be related to the value of blackness in medieval ideas of race. The connotations of

Footnote 80 (continued)

for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c. 1200–c. 1540', *Journal of Medieval History*, 39, 2013, pp. 291–320 (303).

⁸¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 421, fol. 30^v (<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/9e62854b-7dec-4087-b91d-1e0e89ae45d8/surfaces/068fcae7-310f-4abf-8014-ee875e43945c/>, consulted 10 Feb. 2022).

⁸² S. McKendrick, 'The Great History of Troy: A Reassessment of a Secular Theme in Medieval Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54, 1991, pp. 44–80 (62).

⁸³ Cf. J. Harper, 'Turks as Trojans; Trojans as Turks: Visual Images of the Trojan War and the Politics of Cultural Identity in Fifteenth-Century Europe', in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. A. J. Kabir and D. Williams, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 151–79 (165), who sees them as Memnon's soldiers. The identity of the 'roy Menon' in 'The Tent of Achilles' is uncertain, as the accompanying caption says he was killed by Hector, which makes him Merion of Crete, kinsman of Achilles; see *Los tapices de la Catedral de Zamora*, ed. A. Gómez Martínez and B. Chillón Sampedro, Zamora, 1925, pp. 71, 73; Guido de Columnis, *Historia de destructionis Troiae* (n. 40 above), pp. 89, 168.

⁸⁴ P. H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, Ann Arbor, 1985, pp. 11–16.

⁸⁵ L. T. Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, London, 2001, pp. 45–6.

the colour black were strongly negative – it was the colour of demons and executioners, of ‘ugliness, bodily uncleanness, poverty’⁸⁶ – but not wholly so, as the later Middle Ages did see the depiction of black Africans in more positive roles as princes, magi and noble warriors.⁸⁷ There were also cross-overs, from one medium to another, as from text to image. The fictional Saracen knight Otinel, who converted to Christianity, was depicted as black-skinned in a north Italian fresco, even though his skin colour is not mentioned in any text (and his father was described as having ‘white hands’ and ‘long, blond hair’).⁸⁸ Conversely Memnon, king of Ethiopia, whose colour *was* described in well-known classical texts, was envisaged as Asian or white. This could be strongly indicative of the power of whiteness in stories of Troy and of Trojan refugees that were seen as foundational in European history. When Memnon became a proxy for Christ, was only whiteness appropriate? Black was not beautiful.⁸⁹ If Memnon in Roman sources could be black-skinned, that was because discrimination did not then operate by skin colour;⁹⁰ but by 1300 this was no longer the case, as ‘Whiteness became normative, integral, and central to Christian European identity in the thirteenth century’.⁹¹ Skin whitening was widespread across a range of medieval texts: in cosmetic recipes for women’s faces,⁹² in literary works featuring Eastern rulers or Saracen princesses,⁹³ in representations of the biblical queen of Sheba,⁹⁴ and in miracle stories and preachers’ exempla.⁹⁵ Even if readers of texts assumed

⁸⁶ J. Devisse and M. Mollat, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, II.2, Cambridge MA, 1979, pp. 59–60, 71–4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99; Kaplan, *Rise of the Black Magus* (n. 84 above), pp. 85–118; G. Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 2018, pp. 200–203, 208.

⁸⁸ C. Boscolo, ‘The Otinel Frescoes at Treviso and Sesto al Reghena’, *Francigena*, 2, 2016, pp. 201–16. For Otinel’s father, Ferragu (‘la mans blanche e pollie’, ‘cevelure blonde e longue’), see *L’Entrée d’Espagne, chanson de geste franco-italienne*, ed. A. Thomas, 2 vols, Paris, 1913, I, pp. 30, 34. I am grateful to Prof. Marianne Ailes for this last reference.

⁸⁹ Cf. St Bernard on the *Song of Songs*: T. Hahn, ‘The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31, 2001, pp. 1–36 (20). And see K. Lowe, ‘The Global Consequences of Mistranslation: The Adoption of the “Black but ...” Formulation in Europe, 1440–1650’, *Religions*, 3, 2012, pp. 544–55.

⁹⁰ Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity* (n. 6 above), pp. 216–17; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (n. 11 above), pp. 15–16; cf. B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton, 2004, which gives very little attention to Africa: pp. 146, 148.

⁹¹ Heng, *Invention of Race* (n. 87 above), p. 8.

⁹² *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium on Women’s Medicine*, ed. and transl. M. H. Green, Philadelphia, 2001, pp. 178–81; *Il ricettario Bardi: cosmesis e tecnica artistica nella Firenze medicea*, ed. A. P. Torresi, Ferrara, 1994, pp. 69–74. Classical texts also recommended whitening: *Ovid on Cosmetics: Medicamina faciei feminae and Related Texts*, ed. and transl. M. Johnson, London, 2016, pp. 41, 44, 49, 104, 105, 119.

⁹³ *The King of Tars*, ed. J. Perryman, Heidelberg, 1980, p. 98; J. de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters: Whiteness and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in French Medieval Epics*, New York, 1998.

⁹⁴ M. H. Caviness, ‘(Ex)changing Colors: Queens of Sheba and Black Madonnas’, in *Architektur und Monumentalskulptur des 12.–14. Jahrhunderts*, ed. S. Gasser et al., Berne, 2006, pp. 553–70.

⁹⁵ *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. T. F. Crane, London, 1890, p. 88; *History of the Holy Rood-Tree: A Twelfth Century Version of the Cross-Legend*, ed. A. S. Napier, London, 1894, pp. 17–19.

Memnon was black because he was Ethiopian, when he was visualized in images, he was not: like good Saracens and other characters, Memnon's blackness was washed away, and he was transformed once again.⁹⁶

Data availability All the data supporting this research are already publicly available and are cited in the notes.

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⁹⁶ H. M. Arden, review in *Speculum*, 75, 2000, p. 683; G. L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, London, 2002, p. 43, quoting Jerome, on reformed sinners likened to Ethiopians washing themselves clean. On this theme, see J. M. Massing, 'From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert: Washing the Ethiopian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 58, 1995, pp. 180–201.