The Centaur Chiron Visited by Thetis is one of several engravings by the Nuremberg artist Georg Pencz that lead us to believe that he must have made a second trip to Italy in 1539-1540 (fig. 1). The print measures 13.6 x 18.7 cm and is signed with Pencz's monogram and dated 1543 on a cartouche in the upper right corner. An inscription reads ACHILLEM. HV(C)NC. MA / GISTRO. SVO. CHIRCONE. (The first C in HVCN is partly scratched out on the plate.) Pencz represents the nymph Thetis in conversation with Chiron at the mouth of a cave; she is responding to Chiron's complaint that his pupil Achilles—Thetis's son—had grown too wild. Achilles himself has just returned with his companion Patroclus from a lion hunt. The edge of the rocky cave, described with swirling parallel lines and stippling, recalls engravings by Dürrer. The twisting root pointing down towards Thetis's head in particular resembles a passage in the St. Jerome (B. 61). But on the whole Pencz's composition and figures are Italian in flavor. Pencz had already travelled in Italy in the late 1520s. Konrad Oberhuber has linked Pencz's drawing of The Flood in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, after Michelangelo, to that trip. His second visit to Italy around 1539 is inferred principally from the large engraving Capture of Carthagina (B. 86), based on a design by Giulio Romano for the tapestry series of the Triumphs of Scipio Africanus and dated 1539. According to inscriptions, later states of the Capture of Carthagina were printed in Rome. It is often assumed—although strictly speaking without proof—that the first state was also printed in Rome. The Chiron Visited by Thetis shares with this work the motif of the twisting tree root descending from the rocks.

Pencz was intensively active as a printmaker in the early 1540s, his imagination and his sketchbooks apparently replenished by the Italian sojourn. In the series of engravings of famous women of antiquity (B. 70-73) and the Triumphs of Petrarch (B. 117-122), and in Judith and Holofernes (B. 24-25), Pencz evinces antiquarian interest in classical architecture, costume, armor and weapons, and other paraphernalia. The facial and physical types of the women in the Chiron Visited by Thetis, and their hairstyles and robes, are closely matched by the women in, for instance, Sophonisba (B. 82) and Artemisia (B. 83). Pencz internalized a good deal of what he learned from Raphael and his school and integrated it into his own inventions. For example, the devices of suggesting a figure's movement parallel to the picture plane by placing one leg in front of the other, an arm extended, and a slightly hunched back, or histrionically outstretched arms, with spread fingers, were derived generally from Raphael's frescoes in the Stanze and tapestries in the Sistine Chapel. Pencz frequently used such devices in his own compositions, not only in the Chiron Visited by Thetis, but also in the scenes from the Story of Abraham (B. 1-4). Chiron Visited by Thetis is larger and somewhat more complex than most of his prints, however, and may depend directly on an unknown Italian model.

Above all, the engraving emerges out of Pencz's engagement with Giulio Romano. Pencz's connection to Mantua and to Giulio's work there dates back to his first Italian visit. The costumes and hairstyles in the Chiron Visited by Thetis recall figures in Giulio's drawings for the Triumphs of Scipio Africanus, dating from about 1533-1534. Giulio Romano had in fact executed a painting cycle in Mantua, possibly in the mid-1530s, that included scenes from the youth of Achilles. Frederick Hartt proposed that the twelve paintings, six of which are lost, decorated a pair of rooms in the Castello. The cycle included a scene of the Boy Achilles Presenting His First Slain Boar to Chiron. However, the engraving cannot be a copy of one of the lost compositions from that cycle, since Pencz represents Chiron as a faun, with two legs and horns, whereas Giulio represented him correctly as a centaur. Pencz's work may also reflect a composition by Giulio that he came across in Rome.

Nagler mentioned an anonymous copy in reverse of Pencz's engraving, dated 1546. This print was listed by Landau in his catalogue raisonné and by the New Hollstein, but as a woodcut. In fact, it is an engraving (fig. 2). This German copy measures 5.8 x 8.1 cm and is considerably less refined than Pencz's print. The cartouche, now on the left, omits the monogram. Pencz's misspelling "Chircone" is preserved. The copyist has added a blank tavoletta on the ground in front of Achilles. In effect, the copy converts Pencz's composition to the smaller "Little Master" format, perhaps more familiar to the German print market. There are a number of comparable anonymous engraved copies after Pencz's prints.

But Nagler also mentioned a larger woodcut copy of the Chiron Visited by Thetis. In his Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon he listed first a woodcut copy in reverse with dimensions 12 x 18 Zoll, or roughly 12 x 18 inches. He then reported that Frenzel in his catalogue of the Sternberg collection in Dresden had also listed a woodcut copy of Pencz's engraving in reverse, "in the manner of Boldrini." Frenzel reported that the
Sternberg print was mounted and a poor impression, and that it was otherwise unknown. Nagler did not himself see the Sternberg print; it is not certain whether he considered it distinct from the first one he mentioned. In *Die Monogrammisten*, Nagler mentioned only a single woodcut copy, in the manner of Boldrini. In his catalogue raisonné of 1978 Landau listed two copies of the engraving: the small engraved copy dated 1546, described mistakenly as a woodcut; and a woodcut with the dimensions 33.0 × 48.5 cm, which Nagler in *Die Monogrammisten* had supposedly characterized as autograph. This is confusing, first, because Nagler did not say that the woodcut copy was autograph, in fact quite the contrary; and second, because it is not clear what Landau’s source for the dimensions was. Landau himself has never seen the print, as he kindly confirmed in recent correspondence. Landau was apparently treating the woodcut copy “in the manner of Boldrini” and the one measuring 12 × 18 Zoll, mentioned in the *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, as a single print. The New Hollstein volume of 1991, meanwhile, repeated Landau’s descriptions of the two copies. An impression of that woodcut copy after Pencz’s *Chiron Visited by Thetis* has now surfaced. It was acquired by the Yale University Art Gallery in 1980 (fig. 3). The woodcut measures 33.0 × 48.6 cm, almost exactly the dimensions given by Landau. The print is not signed or dated. It can easily be described as “in the manner of Boldrini,” and therefore must be an impression of the print seen by Frenzel and mentioned by Nagler in 1841. The woodcut is not signed or dated; indeed the cartouche with the inscription at the upper right of the engraving has simply been omitted. The woodcut reverses but closely copies Pencz’s composition. The beaker on the table in Chiron’s cave has been altered from a conical to a cylindrical form. The jawbone in Chiron’s hand has four teeth instead of five. Otherwise the woodcut reproduces virtually every detail of the engraving. The woodcut provides slightly less information than the engraving. This confirms our assumption that the woodcut copies the engraving and not the other way around. The descriptions of the rocks and foliage around the cave, and of the twisting root above Thetis’s head, have all been simplified. An example is the group of rocks in the lower right corner of the engraving, reduced to a shapeless threesome in the woodcut. The trim on the boot on Achilles’s front leg has been altered in the woodcut and no longer matches the other boot. It is true that the archer in the background is left-handed in Pencz’s engraving and right-
handed in the copy. But there are other cases of left-handedness in Pencz’s engravings that suggest that such details did not matter to him, for instance the left-handed archer in the background of the Cephalus and Procris of 1539 (B. 73).

The Yale print is reasonably well-preserved. There are several random creases in the paper and a large crease down the middle. The paper has been scored close to the right edge. Large areas on the right hand side and along the top were not well-printed, and there is an area of possible water damage in the lower right. Evidence of wear—Patroclus’s bow is broken, for example—and wormholes in the block suggest a late impression. There is no visible watermark. Virgil Solis and other German artists did make woodcut copies after engravings by Pencz. Although some of these copies are larger than the engraved originals, they are usually a good deal smaller than the Yale print. The Yale print is not German, however, but Venetian. I know of no German woodcuts from the mid-sixteenth century that so strictly rely on parallel lines, straight or only slightly bent, to model their solid forms and create areas of shade. The modelling system in fact connects the print to a group of woodcuts whose core are the outstanding woodcuts based on Titian designs traditionally assigned to Niccolò Boldrini. The size of the block of the Yale print is similar to several prints in the “Boldrini” group, for instance the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine (approx. 33 × 46 cm) or the Deluge (two blocks, each approx. 33 × 47 cm). Boldrini is not a clearly defined figure, but his name is traditionally associated with a number of the best, most vigorous, Venetian woodcuts of the period. Konrad Oberhuber has detached several important prints from the Boldrini oeuvre and given them to Giovanni Britto, a German artist originally named Brit or Bröt and possibly from Augsburg. The works reattributed to Britto are early prints after Titian’s drawings: Landscape with a Milkmaid, St. Jerome in the Wilderness, and the Stigmatization of St. Francis. This amplification of
Britto’s artistic personality has been widely accepted. The woodcutting in the sheet under discussion, however, is not nearly as dynamic as that in the prints assigned to Boldrini or Britto. Here the parallel modelling lines all seem to occupy the same shallow plane, giving the effect of a screen and flattening out the composition. The lines are of fairly uniform thickness and density, and are often grouped into flat patches, functioning more as shading than as markers of three-dimensional form. There is no attempt to match the variety and sensitivity of modelling devices employed by Pencz in his engraving. Nor does the woodcutter exploit the expressive and dynamic possibilities of his own medium. The print lacks the flowing lines that follow the contours of the body, and the depth-creating chiaroscuro, of the best woodcuts after designs by Titian: the Landscape with Milkmaid, St. Jerome, and Stigmatization of St. Francis just mentioned, as well as Britto’s signed Adoration of the Shepherds and the Samson and Delilah.18 The Yale print is better compared with a less impressive group of Venetian woodcuts that reproduced not original drawings but engravings and other woodcuts. One example is the Romantic Couple with Horse and Retainer, a fairly rough copy of a more refined woodcut given to Boldrini (fig. 4).19 The faces of the couple are darkened by diagonal parallel shading just as in the Chiron Visited by Thetis. The modelling of the muscles in Chiron’s back—a passage where the woodcutter has departed significantly from his intaglio source—can be compared to the haunch of the horse in the Romantic Couple. However, it cannot be claimed that this is the same hand that cut the Yale print. The shading lines in Chiron Visited by Thetis never run in the direction of the figures’ arms and legs the way they do in the Romantic Couple. Perhaps an even better comparison is the reversed copy by Andrea Andreani of the large Deluge, dating probably from the end of the sixteenth century (detail, fig. 5).20 The parallel shading in the standing figures, or in the rock just to their left, is similar in manner and quality to the shading in comparable forms in the Yale print.

As far as I know, there are no other Venetian copies after Georg Pencz. Still, it does not seem implausible that an Italian artist or printer would take Pencz as a model. The Deluge itself is now thought to have been based on a design by a northern artist, either Jan van Scorel or Jan Stephan van Calcar.21 We know that two of the most important Venetian woodcutters of the sixteenth century were Germans, not only Britto but also Christoforo Guerra (Krieger) of Nuremberg. But there
is no need to hypothesize a German birth for the woodcutter in order to explain Venetian interest in the *Chiron Visited by Thetis*. Pencz would have been rightly seen by Italians as an accomplished follower of Dürer who had travelled extensively in Italy. A number of Italian artists and printmakers would have known him personally. His *Capture of Carthage* engraving of 1539 was signed with his full name and was reprinted many times by Roman printmakers, indeed until the late eighteenth century. There is also the possibility that a poorly informed printer came across the *Chiron Visited by Thetis* but did not recognize the monogram. In other words, a printmaker might have commissioned a woodcut copy without knowing who the author of the engraving was—or without caring. For Italian printmakers and public, the interest of the print was the composition itself, which reflected or seemed to reflect a Raphaelian model. In that case, the engraver “GP” would have been seen not as an inventor in his own right, but as the mere mediator of the composition.

There is a remarkable piece of evidence that seems to clinch the Italian origins of the woodcut. The engraved trade card of an unknown cloth merchant has been printed on the verso of the sheet, at the middle of the top edge (fig. 6). The card is printed at a slight tilt; it measures between 11.2 and 11.6 cm in height and 11.9 cm in width; at least 2 cm are missing at the lower edge. Trade cards of this sort were enclosed within shipments of cloth, with the order number and the amount and type of cloth entered by hand. The trade card served as a kind of invoice and business card (the actual bill was presumably sent under separate cover). There are two similar draper’s trade cards preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On both of these cards, just as in the present example, the capital N (for “Numero”) and B (for “Braccia”, the unit of length) are already printed; and on all three cards the order number and description of the cloth are written in ink. The inscription on the Yale print appears to read: “No. 749. B[racia] 125 2/4 (?) d. Bolognese Cannellato Nero à Onda Bellissimo.” The Metropolitan Museum trade cards, which are also made out for orders of cannellato (ribbed) silk, and give the names and addresses of two cloth merchants in Reggio di Lombardia (i.e., Reggio Emilia). The card on the verso of the Yale woodcut gives no address. The name of the merchant was possibly on the (missing) lower edge of the card, as it is on one of the Metropolitan cards. The designs of all three trade cards suggest that they date from the first half of the eighteenth century.
The trade card poses a mystery. Which was printed first, woodcut or trade card? We know that merchants already in the seventeenth century used to purchase scrap paper from booksellers and printmakers in order to wrap their merchandise. Thus the first assumption must be that the cloth dealer found a large sheet of paper that happened to have a woodcut printed on it and used it as an insert in one of his deliveries. The merchant ran the sheet through his own roller-press to print the trade card on it. Then he filled in the data with pen and ink and placed the sheet of paper on top of the cloth. It functioned more as a kind of cover sheet than as a wrapper. The bundle of cloth was then very likely wrapped in coarser paper and tied with string, exactly as they are depicted in one of the Metropolitan trade cards. We imagine, finally, that the recipient of the cloth admired the woodcut he or she found on the verso of the invoice and decided to salvage it. This involved cutting down the folio sheet to the edges of the print.

The reverse sequence of printing is much less plausible, it seems to me. It is true that the woodblock itself may well have survived to the eighteenth century, and a printer may well have found it and decided to print an impression from it. The wear and wormholes do suggest a late printing. But the order number and description of the cloth, written by hand on the trade card, prove that the card was actually used as an invoice with a delivery. If we are supposing that the woodcut was printed on the verso of the invoice, we have to imagine that the trade card, wrapped in a parcel with 125 braccia of silk and delivered to a customer, somehow found its way back to a printer’s shop to be reused. It is hard to believe that a customer would have bothered to recycle the paper in this fashion. This would have happened only in the unlikely event that the recipient of the large order of ribbed silk was himself a printmaker.

Therefore we must conclude that the Yale impression of the woodcut copy after Pencz was printed first—whether in the sixteenth century or as late as the eighteenth century—and then reused as a draper’s invoice.

I wish to thank Richard Field, Suzanne Boorsch, and John Marcari for their observations and comments.

2 See K. Oberhuber’s commentary in Recent Acquisitions, National Gallery of Art, Washington, National Gallery of Art 1974, no. 7. Landau, however, connects it with the second trip: Catalogo, p. 44, n. 87. For further evidence of the second trip, see Landau, op. cit. note 1, pp. 42-50.
4 Hartt, op. cit. note 3, pp. 211-217, fig. 464 (Hampton Court).
5 Pencz seems to have been back in Nuremberg by November 1540. Pencz’s drawing after Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, however, poses a chronological problem: the fresco was not exhibited to the public until December 1541. H. G. Ginzel, Georg Pencz als Maler, in: Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst 3. Folge, 17. 1966, p. 67. See Landau’s comments, op. cit. note 1, p. 44, n. 87.
6 Metropolitan Museum of Art, 63.706.124.
7 G.K. Nagler, Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon, vol. 11, Munich 1841, p. 73, no. 91.
12 Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, 1980.43.146.
13 Although the author of the New Hollstein volume, R. Zijlma, said that he had not been able to trace the large woodcut copy, he nevertheless reported, incorrectly, that it was signed with a monogram:
14 Hollstein lists two woodcut copies after Christ and the Children (B. 56, Hollstein 35), for instance, measuring 13 × 16 and 16 × 25 cm. The woodcut copies of the Magician Virgin Hanging in a Basket and the Punished Courtesan (B. 87-88) are somewhat larger than usual: 26.0 × 27.6 cm.
17 Rosand and Muraro, op. cit. note 15, nos. 21-23.
19 Rosand and Muraro, op. cit. note 15, no. 87. 210 × 30.9 cm. For the Boldrini woodcut, see their fig. VIII-4.
20 Rosand and Muraro, op. cit. note 15, no. 81. 46.5 × 69.1 cm (detail approx. 19 × 24 cm).
22 Metropolitan Museum of Art, 60.629.49 and 60.629.50; 19.0 × 14.0 cm and 19.6 × 15.0 cm. I am most grateful to Nadine Orenstein for finding these prints. For examples of English trade cards and engraved invoices from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see J. Lewis, Printed Ephemeris, Ipswich 1962, pp. 172-179, 198-200.
23 For an example of a similar card from the sixteenth century, with the address of a Venetian silk merchant, see A. Davis, Package and Print: The Development of Container and Label Design, New York 1967, plate 46.
24 For samples of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century cannellato silks, see the exhibition catalogue of the Gandini Collection, Museo Civico, Modena 1985. For reproductions of seven more trade cards from firms in Reggio Emilia, see N. Campanini, Ars Siricca Regii: vicende dell’arte della seta in Reggio Emilia dal secolo XVI al secolo XIX, Reggio Emilia 1888; reprint Bologna ’973, unnumbered pages at end of volume.
25 Davis, op. cit. note 23, p. 49.