

Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.78-91: Translation, and
Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.92-102: A Critical Commentary

Angeliki Papastamati (2504330)

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Professor Ruth Parkes

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I. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.78-91 Greek Text and Translation

οὐ πω πείσματα νηὸς ἐπ' ἠπείροιο περαίης
 βάλλον, ὁ δὲ κραιπνοὺς χέρσῳ πόδας ἤκεν Ἴησων
 80 ὑψοῦ ἀπ' ἰκριόφιν· μετὰ δὲ Φρόντις τε καὶ Ἄργος,
 υἷε δὴ Φρίξου, χαμάδις θόρον. ἢ δ' ἄρα τοὺς γε
 γούνων ἀμφοτέρησι περισχομένη προσέειπεν·
 “ἔκ με, φίλοι, ρύσασθε δυσάμμορον, ὥς δὲ καὶ
 αὐτοὺς
 ὑμέας, Αἰήταο· πρὸ γάρ τ' ἀναφανδὰ τέτυκται
 85 πάντα μάλ', οὐδέ τι μῆχος ἰκάνεται. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ νηὶ
 φεύγωμεν, πρὶν τὸν γε θεῶν ἐπιβήμεναι ἵππων.
 δώσω δὲ χρύσειον ἐγὼ δέρος εὐνήσασσα
 φρουρὸν ὄφιν· τὴν δὲ θεοὺς ἐνὶ σοῖσιν ἐταίροις,
 ξεῖνε, τεῶν μύθων ἐπίστορας, οὓς μοι ὑπέστης,
 90 ποιήσαι, μηδ' ἔνθεν ἐκαστέρῳ ὀρμηθεῖσαν
 χήτει κηδεμόνων ὀνοτὴν καὶ ἀεικέα θείης.”¹

They had not yet cast the ship's mooring ropes

on to the bank opposite, when Jason leapt down, swift-footed, onto the land

80 from the deck above; and after him Phrontis and Argus,

¹ Apollonius Rhodius. *Argonautica*. W. H. Race (ed. and trans.). 2009 Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Phrixus' two sons, sprang to the ground. She

clasped their knees with both hands and addressed them:

“Rescue me, wretched as I am, friends, as well as

yourselves,

from Aeetes; for all things stand in full and open view,

85 and no means (of escape) comes within reach. Come, let us flee

aboard the ship, before he mounts his swift horses.

I shall give you the golden fleece, once I have lulled

to sleep its guardian serpent. And you, stranger, in the presence of your companions

call upon the gods as witnesses to the pledges

90 you made me, and render me, once I have travelled

further away, despicable and unseemly, bereft of guardians.”

II. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.92-102 Greek Text and Translation

ἴσκεν ἀκηχεμένη· μέγα δὲ φρένες Αἰσονίδαο
 γήθεον. αἶψα δέ μιν περὶ γούνασι πεπτηῦϊαν
 ἦκ' ἀναειρόμενος προσπύξατο, θάρσυνέν τε·
 95 “δαιμονίη, Ζεὺς αὐτὸς Ὀλύμπιος ὄρκιος ἔστω
 Ἥρη τε Ζυγίη, Διὸς εὐνέτις, ἥ μὲν ἐμοῖσιν
 κουριδίην σε δόμοισιν ἐνιστήσεσθαι ἄκοιτιν,
 εὖτ' ἂν ἐς Ἑλλάδα γαῖαν ἰκώμεθα νοστήσαντες.”
 ὥς ηὔδα, καὶ χεῖρα παρασχεδὸν ἥραρε χειρὶ
 100 δεξιτερήν. ἡ δέ σφιν ἐς ἱερὸν ἄλσος ἀνώγει
 νῆα θοὴν ἐλάαν αὐτοσχεδόν, ὄφρ' ἔτι νύκτωρ
 κῶας ἐλόντες ἄγοιντο παρὲκ νόον Αἰήταο.²

She spoke, her voice filled with grief; yet the heart of Aeson's son
 leapt with joy. Quickly, as she crouched at his knees,
 he lifted her gently, drew her into his arms, and spoke affectionately to her.
 95 “Lady, may Olympian Zeus himself,
 and Hera, guardian of marriage, Zeus' bed companion, witness to my oath,
 that you shall be my lawful wife in my household,
 once we have returned safely to the land of Greece.”

² Apollonius Rhodius. *Argonautica*. Edited and translated by William H. Race. Loeb Classical Library 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009

With that, he immediately took

100 her right hand in his own. Then she ordered them to row the swift ship at once

towards the nearby sacred grove, so that, while it was still night,

they might seize the Fleece and carry it off without Aeetes' knowledge.

III. A Critical Commentary on A.R. Arg. 4.92-102

In this passage Jason responds to Medea's supplication by lifting her from the ground and swearing a solemn oath that he will make her his lawful wife once they reach Greece. The scene brings together several traditional epic rituals, namely supplication, divine invocation and hand-clasping,³ while simultaneously introducing an element of dramatic irony, since readers familiar with the later myth know that Jason will ultimately betray the promise he makes here.

Apollonius highlights the contrast between Medea's distress and Jason's reaction. Medea speaks ἀκηχεμένη⁴ (in anguish), while μέγα... φρένες Αἰσονίδαο / γήθεον (the heart of Aeson's son leapt with joy). The juxtaposition emphasises the asymmetry of the moment. Medea has abandoned family and homeland, whereas Jason's response is primarily joy. The Homeric colouring of the phrase⁵ situates the scene within epic diction,⁶ however the emotional contrast also subtly raises questions about his response and Jason's character since Medea's desperation is the immediate cause of his success. Jason's reaction appears motivated not only by the prospect of obtaining the Fleece but also by Medea herself, as his immediate physical response by lifting and embracing her suggests. Yet this apparent warmth proves unstable, anticipating the later fragility of Jason's commitment as the narrative develops.

Jason's reaction follows the conventional ritual of supplication.⁷ Medea is described as πεπτηνῖαν... περὶ γούνασι (crouched at his knees), a posture strongly reminiscent of Homeric

³ Gould, 1973, pp.90-4; Naiden, 2006, pp.239-400; Plantinga, 2000, pp.105-28

⁴ cf. *Il.* 5.364 ἣ δ' ἐς δίφρον ἔβαινε ἀκηχεμένη φίλον ἦτορ

⁵ cf. γήθεον *Il.* 7.127 ὅς ποτέ μ' εἰρόμενος μέγ' ἐγήθεεν ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, and similar phrases at 8.559, 11.683, 13.494

⁶ Hulse, 2015, p.81

⁷ cf. *Eur. Med.* 710; *Eur.Or.* 1414; *Hdt.Hist.* 9.76

scenes.⁸ However, Apollonius' πεπτηυῖαν adds a more vivid and emotional dimension to the gesture. Derived from πίπτω⁹ or πτήσσω¹⁰, the perfect participle suggests a posture of fearful crouching rather than simply kneeling, intensifying Medea's vulnerability. At the same time, Jason's response, ἀναειρόμενος προσπύξατο, θάρσυνέν τε, introduces physical reassurance: he lifts and embraces her. The cluster of long verbs slows the rhythm of the narrative and lends the moment a ceremonial tone, anticipating the oath that Jason is about to swear. The reading θάρσυνεν has been questioned on the grounds that "encouraging" Medea sits uneasily with the solemn oath that follows, therefore, φώνησεν has been suggested instead.¹¹ The transitive verb, however, rather than simply introducing the oath, may be deliberate since Jason's speech functions primarily to reassure Medea in her distress as the expression of a deeply binding commitment, a nuance that fits uneasily with the later tradition of his broken promise.

Jason opens with Δαιμονίη, a common Homeric address¹² that can imply the interlocutor has spoken rashly but here it may suggest that he views Medea's anxiety as excessive. The oath itself invokes Zeus and Hera, here defined as Διὸς εὐνέτις and Ζυγίη,¹³ patroness of marriage. This invocation strengthens the apparent seriousness of Jason's pledge to install Medea as his legitimate wife within his household, a central element of Greek marriage. The phrase κουριδίην... ἄκοιτιν (lawful wife) evokes traditional epic language for marriage¹⁴, while the expression Ἐλλάδα

⁸ cf. *Il.* 1.500–1 (Thetis supplicating Zeus) καὶ ῥα πάροιθ' αὐτοῖο καθέζετο, καὶ λάβε γούνων / σκαιῇ, δεξιτερῇ δ' ἄρ' ὑπ' ἀνθερεῶνος ἐλοῦσα; *Od.* 7.147 (Odysseus supplicating Arete)

σόν τε πόσιν σά τε γούναθ' ἰκάνω...τούσδε τε δαιτυμόνας

⁹ Hunter, 2015, p.96

¹⁰ Hulse, 2015, p.82

¹¹ Fränkel 1961, p.xiv

¹² cf. *Il.* 24.194 (Priam to Hecabe) δαιμονίη Διόθεν μοι Ὀλύμπιος ἄγγελος ἦλθε

¹³ cf. Nonn. *D.* 4.322

¹⁴ cf. Hom. *Od.* 21.316

γαῖαν, reflects Apollonius' own diction and emphasises Medea's transition from the non-Greek world of Colchis into the Greek sphere. Yet the solemnity of the oath also carries strong dramatic irony in light of the later story of Jason and Medea.

By joining hands with Medea, χεῖρα... ἤραρε χειρὶ δεξιτερήν, Jason reinforces the ritual seriousness of the oath. Similar hand-clasping accompanies oaths or agreements in epic¹⁵ and tragedy¹⁶ marking the establishment of a binding pledge. The gesture may also evoke the ritual language of Greek marriage, where the union was formally declared by the bride's κύριος and the groom before divine witnesses. In this scene, however, Medea effectively negotiates the union herself, which some scholars interpret as a "masculinisation" of her role,¹⁷ since she assumes a position normally occupied by the bride's guardian. Furthermore, in traditional wedding ritual the clasp between the bride's father and the groom represents a formal agreement between equals, whereas the groom's leading of the bride reflects a hierarchical relationship. Medea's clasp with Jason, by contrast, resembles the gesture exchanged between male φίλοι, thus suggesting a pledge between partners rather than a purely hierarchical union. Nevertheless, evidence for oath-exchange between women and men indicates that such reciprocity need not be viewed solely in masculine terms.¹⁸

Despite Medea's earlier posture as suppliant (83-91), the balance of power quickly shifts. Immediately after the oath she ἀνώγει (ordered) the Argonauts to row to the sacred grove and seize the Fleece παρὲκ νόον Αἰήταο (without Aeetes' knowledge). Medea thus moves from vulnerability

¹⁵ cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.339-341, 21.286; Virg. *Aen.* 1.408

¹⁶ cf. Eur. *Med.* 21-2 βοᾷ μὲν ὄρκους, ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιᾶς / πίστιν μεγίστην; Eur. *Supp.* 277

¹⁷ Hunter, 1989

¹⁸ Sommerstein and Torrance, 2014, pp.156-179

to authority within a few lines. This transition reveals a central tension in the episode. Although she appears dependent on Jason, she rapidly becomes the decisive agent directing the quest. Medea's protective role is already evident earlier in the narrative (3.828-70) where she assumes a protective role towards Jason, providing the magical drug that shields him from the fire-breathing bulls and instructing him how to complete Aeetes' challenge.

Overall the passage highlights Medea's unusual authority and the reciprocity of their interaction, suggesting a temporary inversion of conventional gender roles and emphasising that Jason's success depends as much on Medea's intervention as on his own heroism.

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