

Personal Favor and Public Influence: Arete, Arsinoë II, and the *Argonautica*

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This interdisciplinary study explores the connection between the Ptolemaic monarchy and the Phaeacian episodes in Homer's *Odyssey* and the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. In particular, I am interested in what the epic representation of the Phaeacian queen Arete can tell us about the political influence of Arsinoë II Philadelphus, ruler of Egypt with Ptolemy II in the third century B.C.E. The close relation between Alexandrian poetry and court politics makes it likely that the portrait of Arete alludes to Arsinoë's reputation as a powerful voice in Ptolemy's administration.

Homer, Apollonius, and the Ptolemies

In the first half of the third century B.C.E. Apollonius studied and worked in the Royal Library of Alexandria. He wrote numerous poems as well as scholarly monographs, held the position of head librarian, and served as the royal tutor of Ptolemy III Euergetes, the son of Ptolemy II and his first wife, Arsinoë I. His only extant work is the *Argonautica*, an epic that recounts the travels of Jason and the heroes who recover the golden fleece after sailing on the Argo from Thessaly to the kingdom of Aeëtes on the edge of the Black Sea. Books 1 and 2 describe the voyage east, Book 3 focuses on Jason's meetings with Aeëtes and his daughter Medea, and Book 4, with which we are primarily concerned, narrates the return to Greece.

In his 1912 commentary, Mooney observed that the Homeric epics "constitute in the truest sense the *πηγή καὶ ἀρχή* ["fount and origin"] of the *Argonautica*" (13). It is certainly true that appreciation of the *Argonautica* entails familiarity with Homeric narrative, vocabulary, and modes of expression. Echoes of Homer resound throughout the poem, as Apollonius reworks and adapts the archaic material. Yet the *Argonautica* is

hardly a traditional oral epic, or even an oral-derived text like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* (Foley 1990:6). Passages from one or more versions of the written poem may have been performed by Apollonius in public,¹ but it is evident that our poet did not compose in performance, and that he wrote the *Argonautica* largely for a literate audience—that is, to be read (aloud) in private.² Apollonius viewed epic poetry from the perspective of a textual critic, with this kind of criticism having begun only recently, under Aristotle (Thomas 1992:92, Nagy 1996:121-27). At the Library of Alexandria Apollonius had access to numerous Homeric papyri of various degrees of “reliability.” Holdings in the Library, acquired from booksellers in Athens and Rhodes, would have included commercial papyri (*koinai*, *demodeis*, *eikaioterai*) and city-texts (*politikai*), together with the recensions of individual critics.³ From these various and multiform manuscripts the Alexandrian critics sought to establish an original, authentic edition of Homer.⁴ Zenodotus, born c. 325 B.C.E., was the first Alexandrian *diorthôtes* (“corrector”) of Homeric texts, and we know that Apollonius published at least one monograph that was critical of his readings.⁵ One may

¹ Green 1997:1-8. One of the two biographical “Lives” of Apollonius that were preserved with the manuscripts of the poem refers to a failed performance (*epideixis*) that allegedly caused Apollonius to emigrate to Rhodes, where he subsequently improved the poem.

² Knight 1995:3, n. 10; Beye 1982:25-26; Hunter 1989:42. See also Thomas 1992:9, 13, 93; cf. Gavrilo 1997, who argues that silent reading was widely practiced in the ancient Mediterranean world.

³ Allen 1924:271-326; West 1967:11-18; Foley 1990:22-26; Nagy 1996:96-103. Although these “eccentric” or “wild” Homeric papyri were presumably modeled on standardized, post-Peisistratean Panathenaic text(s), they show added lines and considerable orthographic variation in comparison with extant medieval manuscripts and are dated, for the most part, prior to 150 B.C.E. Consistent orthography and *numerus versus* in papyri after 150 B.C.E. are attributed to an improved and expanded book trade and, possibly, the influence of the scholar Aristarchus (216-144 B.C.E.).

⁴ Nagy 1996:149-53. Nagy has vigorously debated the existence of an authentic Homeric control text used by the Alexandrians to establish canonical readings. Rather than rejecting textual variants as deviations from a single original edition, Nagy argues for a “multitextual editorial framework” that is able to accommodate authenticated manuscript variants by dating them to a particular historical context.

⁵ The monograph, now lost, was entitled *πρὸς Ζηνόδοτον* (“Against Zenodotus”). It should be noted that Apollonius succeeded Zenodotus as the head of the

view the *Argonautica* as a participant in this critical debate (Mooney 1912:50-51), an organic variant or rather a mannered extension of Homeric diction that was likely to reach a broader readership than the monographs or marginalia of contemporary commentaries. In John Miles Foley's terms, it is clear that Apollonius sought to confer denotative meaning on passages that, in a multiform, oral-traditional context, would have conveyed inherent meaning.⁶

Although Apollonius' compositional method differed from that of traditional epic poets, he wrote in an idiom that consciously emulated Homeric models even as it announced its own literary innovation. We might describe this process as the "reoralization" of written epic: the occasional repetition of a scene or a speech that recalls an oral paradigm or alludes to a specific Homeric parallel (Cairns 1998:65). The poet transposed oral features into written epic in order to retain the authenticity and immediacy of a traditional performance (Oesterreicher 1997:213-14). Like Callimachus, Apollonius followed the principle of *imitatio cum variatio*: the *Argonautica* employs Homeric constructions, but alters them with the expectation that readers would still recognize the original scenes and linguistic patterns (Giangrande 1976:271-76). So, for example, in Homer we consistently find the phrase *pukinon epos* ("wise word") between the medial caesura and bucolic diaeresis (Foley 1991:155). Apollonius, on the other hand, situates the phrase earlier in the line, divides it, and even inverts the word order (*epos in thumoi pukinon*, 4.111; *pukinon phasthai epos*, 4.1200). The long-debated phrase *epea pteroenta* ("winged words") provides another case in point (Martin 1989:30-32, Foley 1990:129-37). Oral poets would not necessarily have seen *epea pteroenta* as a detachable unit (Foley 1990:136), yet Apollonius certainly did, for he omits not only *epea pteroenta* in the *Argonautica*, but also any instance of *epos* in the nominative or accusative plural. Apollonius also maintains the semantic contrast between *epos* and *muthos* that is discussed in Richard Martin's 1984 study of Homeric speech acts. I will argue below that this differentiation between *epos* and *muthos* helps to clarify Arsinoë's role in the Ptolemaic administration.

Library (270-245 B.C.E.?). See further Pfeiffer 1968:146-48 and Fraser 1972:I, 320-35, 449-58.

⁶ Cf. Dowden 1996. Noting the difficulty of deriving extratextual meanings for a poem whose external (oral) tradition is largely lost, Dowden argues for the relative fixity of traditional epic and the perceptible influence of other examples of the Epic Cycle, such as the *Aithiopsis*, on the *Iliad*.

In order to understand more fully how these two terms function in the *Argonautica*, we must closely compare the narrative circumstances in which Arete speaks in both poems.⁷ Both Homer and Apollonius idealize Arete, although their descriptions of an ideal queen differ in an important respect. The Homeric Arete publicly defends Odysseus, whereas in the *Argonautica* Arete helps Medea by speaking privately to Alcinous. In addition, Apollonius expands Alcinous' administrative role. The Homeric Alcinous governs with thirteen other rulers (*basileis*), but in the *Argonautica* Alcinous governs Phaeacia independently. It might therefore appear that Alcinous becomes more dominant in the later epic as Arete simultaneously becomes less authoritative, speaking privately to the king rather than before the assembled Phaeacians. However, Apollonius emphasizes Arete's status and authority by describing her speech as a semantically weighted *muthos*, in contrast to the lighter, generic *epos* of Alcinous.

By eliminating the Homeric council and streamlining the Phaeacian government, Apollonius simulates the Ptolemaic monarchy. Apollonius' reconfiguration of Arete's role is especially intriguing in light of the controversy over the influence of Arsinoë II Philadelphus. Arsinoë, called "une femme énergique et ambitieuse" by Bouché-Leclercq (1903:161-62), had returned to Egypt after the deaths of her previous husbands, Lysimachus and Ptolemy Ceraunus.⁸ There she married her younger brother, Ptolemy II, and ruled with him for about eight years until her death in 270 B.C.E., roughly the time of the composition of the *Argonautica* (Hunter 1989:1-9). Whether the *Argonautica* was composed during Arsinoë's reign or at some point after her death and deification is of less importance to my argument than the recognition that, for Apollonius, the influence of an ideal queen was to be exercised from behind the throne, rather than publicly, in the manner of the Homeric Arete. Homer describes Arete as a conspicuous figure among the Phaeacians, who gaze after her as though she were a goddess (*Od.* 7.71-

⁷ For a thorough analysis of both Phaeacian episodes, see Knight 1995:244-57 and Kyriakou 1995:156-68.

⁸ Arsinoë's influence over the elderly Lysimachus was strongly implied by the execution of Agathocles, his eldest son by a previous marriage: his death would presumably have secured the political future of her own children (Pausanias 1.10.3-4; Justin, *Epitome* 17.1.4-6; Memnon, *FGrH* 3B 434.5-6). After the death of Lysimachus, Arsinoë married Ptolemy Ceraunus over the objections of her eldest son; Ceraunus soon murdered her younger sons (Justin, *Epitome* 24.3.1-8). On her arrival in Egypt Arsinoë was probably instrumental in the intrigue that led to the exile of Ptolemy II's first wife to Koptos (scholiast to Theocritus, *Idyll* 17.129). See Ogden 1999:59-62; 74, n. 44.

72). Although Arsinoë's prominent status as a cult figure in Egypt after her death is well documented,⁹ the nature and extent of her power during her rule in Egypt continues to be debated.¹⁰ For example, the Egyptian title *nsw-b'itj* ("King of Upper and Lower Egypt") was unusual for a queen and implies that Arsinoë's political sway exceeded customary expectations for royal consorts.¹¹ Furthermore, the Athenian Chremonides noted that Ptolemy II continued to favor the common freedom of the Greeks "in accordance with the policy of his predecessors *and his sister*."¹² Some scholars have accordingly questioned evidence that discredits Arsinoë's official role in foreign policy.¹³ As I shall show, the circumstances of Arete's *muthos* (what she says, where she speaks, whom she addresses, and the effect her speech has) suggest how Arsinoë may have exercised her political power.

It may seem curious to connect epic directly with Ptolemaic politics, but recent work has shown that the *Argonautica* sheds more light on its contemporary context than scholars had previously believed. For example, Hunter has demonstrated that the Argonauts' worship of Homonoia ("social harmony") reflects Hellenistic cult practice (1995:19, n. 28), and that the conclusion of the poem alludes to Ptolemy's rightful control over Cyrene.¹⁴

⁹ Rowlandson 1998:28-33. On Ptolemy's posthumous deification of Arsinoë as an Egyptian (as well as Greek) goddess, see Hölbl 2001:101-4; on her iconography, see Koenen 1993.

¹⁰ Hazzard 2000:82-100, esp. 96-99. Pomeroy (1984:17-20) argues for Arsinoë's dominance, while the strongest proponent of the "weak" Arsinoë thesis is Burstein 1982.

¹¹ On Egyptian evidence, see Quaegebeur 1971:205-9, 1988:45. See Hauben 1982:espec. 114-19 and 126 on her ties with Greek freedom; also Fraser 1972:I, 239-40. Hauben (1970:35-41, 63-67) addresses Arsinoë's well-known ties with Callicrates, commander of the Ptolemaic navy. The poets Posidippus, Hedyllus, and Callimachus celebrated Callicrates' dedication of the temple at Cape Zephyrion to Arsinoë -Aphrodite (Fraser 1972:I, 239-40).

¹² *Syllecta Inscriptionum Graecarum* 434/35= *Inscriptiones Graecae* II, 687; emphasis mine. Burstein (1982:208) argues that the reference to Arsinoë is purely honorific and signals her cult status rather than an actual role in the formation of public policy.

¹³ Hazzard 2000:95-96; Pomeroy 1984:17-20; Rowlandson 1998:26.

¹⁴ Hunter 1993:153 notes that the frame of the poem is "explicitly political" and that the end of the *Argonautica* supports Ptolemy rather than Magas as the rightful ruler of Cyrene. Callimachus the Cyrenian, on the other hand, praised Magas in his hymns; see Laronde 1987:362-70.

As court poetry, the *Argonautica* could be expected to touch on contemporary issues, and encomia for the Ptolemies were obviously encouraged. The *Argonautica* is thus as politically relevant and evocative as Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus* or Theocritus' *Idyll* 17. In contrast to these poems, however, which refer openly to the Ptolemies, the *Argonautica* veils political references in allusion. The epic framework allowed the poet to place sensitive references at a politically safe remove.

Such caution might well be expected for poetry supported by royal patronage, and the Ptolemies' incestuous marriage made them vulnerable to poetic criticism.¹⁵ The Ptolemies sought to make a virtue of their blood kinship by rationalizing their marriage as a *hieros gamos* akin to that of Zeus and Hera, an association that is made explicit by Theocritus (*Id.* 17.131-32).¹⁶ The idealized marriage of the epic rulers Alcinous and Arete was similarly reinforced by close kinship. Homer describes Arete as Alcinous' niece (*Od.* 7.53-68), and Hesiod regarded Arete as the sister of Alcinous, according to an Alexandrian scholiast.¹⁷ As Hunter has shown, Alcinous and Arete themselves were understood by the Alexandrians to be analogues of Zeus and Hera.¹⁸ The marriage of the Ptolemies was therefore modeled on a divine marriage that linked them in turn with the rulers of Phaeacia.

The political force of this extended connection between the Ptolemies and the Phaeacians is not entirely clear. Would the allusion to the Phaeacians have been recognized as flattery or criticism of the Ptolemies? Apollonius depicted the ideal queen as an advisor interceding privately on behalf of her favorites, not as a figure who expressed her own opinions publicly. One might therefore object that Apollonius intended the fictional

¹⁵ Sotades of Maroneia unwisely alluded to the union of Zeus and Hera in order to criticize the Ptolemies; this lampoon led to his imprisonment and execution ([Plutarch] *Moralia* 11A, Hegesander *apud* Athenaeus 14.620f-21a). See Cameron 1995:18, n. 100.

¹⁶ On poetic references to the royal marriage, see Bouché-Leclercq 1903:163 with n. 2. On the dates of the deification and marriage, see Hazzard 2000:89-90.

¹⁷ Ἡσίοδος δὲ ἀδελφὴν Ἀλκινόου τὴν Ἀρήτην ὑπέλαβεν (fr. 222 Merkelbach-West). I thank the anonymous reader for bringing this reference to my attention.

¹⁸ Hunter 1993:161-62. See Hazzard 2000:91-92 on the practice of flattering kings by praising Zeus.

monarchy as a corrective model,¹⁹ and that the idealized portrait of a discreet Arete implicitly criticizes an excessive display of queenly power. If, on the other hand, Arsinoë was indeed celebrated for her tactful influence, we could confirm that the portrait of Arete was a poetic mirror intended not to catch the real queen, but to compliment her discretion. In the absence of additional evidence it is difficult to rule out the possibility of cleverly disguised political censure, but it should be pointed out that similar objections might well be raised with respect to all Ptolemaic encomia.

While we cannot determine the precise extent of Arsinoë's power through an examination of epic poetry, we may say that Arete's behavior implies that Arsinoë's policies and recommendations were biased towards her personal favorites. Apollonius' representation of Arete's influence would therefore be in accord with R. A. Hazzard's assessment that Arsinoë was widely perceived as powerful, regardless of her documented responsibilities in the administration.²⁰ Thus, while this study concentrates on the evidence offered by the poems themselves, the political ramifications of the Phaeacian episode remain an important consideration. After examining the division of labor between Alcinous and Arete in both poems, I address the revision of Arete's public role in the later epic. How exactly was Arete's hidden influence idealized as the bureaucratic counterweight of Alcinous' publicly demonstrated authority? As we shall see, both Alcinous and Arete are praised for their respective contributions to the resolution of the conflict between the Argonauts and the Colchians. Of critical importance, however, is the chorus of Phaeacian women who publicly commend Arete for her disclosure of Alcinous' *pukinon epos*. The Phaeacian episode thus presents a sympathetic view of the queen's efforts on behalf of her favorites. Apollonius enlists a traditional Homeric episode in order to comment on the hidden channels of power in the Ptolemaic court.

¹⁹ Claiming friendship with both Carthage and Rome in 252 B.C.E., Ptolemy offered to mediate between them, no doubt to avoid involvement in a costly war (Appian, *Sikelikê* 1). Ptolemy's generous neutrality in the West may have been necessitated by his diplomatic isolation in the East (Hauben 1982:107).

²⁰ Hazzard 2000:99: "the perception of Arsinoë's power was common to those persons outside the court during Ptolemy II's reign . . . Arsinoë II had extraordinary status, and men identified that status with power, especially after the king promoted the cult of Arsinoë Philadelphus throughout his realm in 268."

Arete in the *Odyssey*

The circumstances of Odysseus' arrival on Scheria are well known, but I would like to begin by reviewing those aspects that will prove significant for comparison with the Phaeacian episode in the *Argonautica*. We learn from Athena that Alcinous and all the Phaeacians hold Arete in high esteem. She resolves the quarrels of those she favors, even quarrels between men, which would not normally fall within the purview of women (*Od.* 7.73-74). Athena adds that in general the Phaeacians are hostile to strangers and avoid human contact, although they are skilled sailors (7.30-33). Because the appearance of Odysseus is likely to create conflict, Arete's favor and her talents as peacemaker will be critical for persuading the Phaeacians to help him return to Ithaca.

Odysseus enters the palace invisibly and appears as he kneels in supplication before Arete. The elderly counselor Echeneus is the first to recover, and he quickly reminds Alcinous of the sanctity of suppliants. This observation seems to be made not simply for Alcinous, but for the benefit of all the Phaeacians, who are presumably shocked by the sudden appearance of a stranger. Arete recognizes his clothes as her own handiwork (7.233-39), yet refrains from questioning him until after the other Phaeacian chiefs have departed. She does not demand a public explanation, but waits to consult with her guest in private. Arete also quietly advises Odysseus to guard the gift chest as he sleeps on the return voyage to Ithaca (8.442-45). Odysseus is a stranger, a *xeinos*, but he is also Arete's suppliant, and she therefore shields him from public scrutiny and encourages him to be wary of the arrogant members of her own community.²¹ Thus, the Homeric Arete is a discreet and tactful strategist, sensitive to issues of privacy. She will display similar qualities in the *Argonautica* when she arranges for the secret wedding of Jason and Medea.

Arete further supports Odysseus by speaking publicly on his behalf. In Book 11, when he pauses in his description of his encounter with the queens of the past in the underworld, Arete turns to the stunned Phaeacians and asks: "How does this man seem to you now, in looks and stature and even temperament?" (11.336-37). Odysseus is her personal guest, she says, but each of them shares in the responsibility for his proper treatment (11.338). Having claimed Odysseus as her *xeinos*, Arete calls on all the Phaeacians to emulate her actions by offering gifts. In Book 8 Alcinous

²¹ On the hostile Phaeacians, see Ross 1969, Redfield 1983:240-42, and Carnes 1993.

directed the Phaeacian chiefs to be generous to Odysseus, and Arete here publicly voices support of her husband.

Arete's speech is seconded by Echeneus (11.344-46):

Friends, our wise queen speaks not wide of the mark,
nor does she fall short of our expectations. Do be persuaded.
The deed and the word (*ergon te epos te*) depend on Alcinous.²²

Echeneus praises Arete, but his speech directs the attention of the audience to Alcinous, whose authority is now underscored with the statement that “the deed and the word depend on Alcinous.” Alcinous takes his cue and announces that all the Phaeacians are responsible for providing Odysseus with gifts and an escort home, adding that his own position necessarily entails greater responsibility (11.352-53): “His safe conduct will concern all our men, yet me most of all, for mine is the authority in the community.” Alcinous here declares that all will participate in the escort, and then claims that his authority demands greater concern for the stranger's safety. This statement reverses the emphasis of Arete's statement at 11.338, where she named Odysseus as her personal *xeinós*, and then called for contributions from all the Phaeacians. Arete's role as hostess is lifted into the public sphere by Alcinous' explicit reference to his authority. Alcinous thus transforms Arete's private responsibility for her *xeinós* into support for his own political standing.

Arete in the *Argonautica*

In *Argonautica* 4, Apollonius expands on the Homeric distinction between Arete's private concern for suppliants and Alcinous' sense of his public responsibility and status (Kyriakou 1995:157-58). He portrays them as ideal, benevolent rulers whose administrative roles seem to be determined by their respective genders. Alcinous is a diplomatic ruler concerned with the resolution of strife (*Arg.* 4.1010). He is more attentive than Arete to the complexity of the threat posed by the conflict between the Argonauts and the Colchians. By contrast, Arete is swayed by compassion for Medea, and adopts clandestine means to protect her. She uses her influence in private counsel with Alcinous, who sympathizes with Medea but is not willing to provoke international conflict on her behalf (4.1073-1109). Out of consideration for Arete, Alcinous divulges his plan to allow Medea's marital

²² All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

status to decide the issue. Arete is therefore able to arrange for a secret wedding the night before the Colchians are informed of the judgment in the public assembly.

Let us consider these events in greater detail. The Phaeacians welcome the Argonauts to their island as if they were their own children (4.997). The newcomers are not threatened by arrogant Phaeacians, but rather by the Colchian army that is still in pursuit of Medea. Medea implores Arete to protect her (4.1011-13), and the description of her supplication clearly recalls Odysseus' appeal to Arete (*Od.* 7.142).²³ In both stories, Arete is asked to intercede with the Phaeacians on behalf of her guests.²⁴ Medea tries to justify her actions, noting that she left home only under the influence of *Atê*, the divine folly that leads mortals to ruin (*Arg.* 4.1016-17). She claims that she did not willingly run away with strange men, but was compelled to flee out of fear (4.1021). She points out that she is still a virgin, and concludes by begging the queen to pity her and to use her influence over her husband (4.1025-26).

Arete's audience with Medea prepares us for her subsequent conversation with Alcinous in the privacy of their bedroom (4.1068-71):

Thus within the house in the city, as in time past
Lord Alcinous and the most revered wife of Alcinous
Arete deliberated about the maiden
in their bed in the dark. . . .

The phrase "as in time past" implies not only their customary deliberations, but their customary preparations for bed as it was described "in time past" in Homer. We recall that Arete had initially waited to speak with Odysseus after the departure of the chiefs. The description of the evening then draws to a close with the following passage (*Od.* 7.344-47):

So then long-suffering noble Odysseus lay down to sleep
in a fitted bed in the echoing colonnade.
But Alcinous went to bed inside his lofty home
and his lady wife made the marriage bed beside him.

²³ Medea's reluctance to trust a third party recalls Odysseus' mistrust of his Phaeacian hosts (Most 1989).

²⁴ Odysseus addresses Arete primarily (1.146), though he also addresses her husband and the other guests at the banquet (7.147-48). Odysseus asks all the Phaeacians to help him (7.151), but Medea appeals only to Arete, although she also demands help from all the Argonauts.

In contrast to Homeric epic, which does not describe private conversations between Alcinous and Arete, Apollonius brings his audience into the royal bedroom to reveal Arete as she exercises her influence over her husband just as Medea had requested.²⁵ The passage might appear voyeuristic, inasmuch as the audience visualizes the couple in the darkened bedroom. Yet, the poet avoids any hint of physical intimacy, and there is no hint of a Hera-like seduction in Arete's speech (*Arg.* 4.1073-95). Apollonius essentially substitutes this conversation for the Homeric Arete's public defense of Odysseus.²⁶ In fact, there is no reference in the *Argonautica* to an assembly or council of Phaeacian nobles, nor is there an equivalent for the counselor Echeneus. The king will simply announce his decision to the assembled Argonauts, Colchians, and Phaeacians, flanked by an elite corps of the army (4.1180-81). These Phaeacian *aristoi* apparently played no role in the deliberations, and their presence serves largely to remind the Colchians of the military strength behind Alcinous' decision.²⁷ Theocritus describes Ptolemy in similar terms at *Idyll* 17.93-94: "about him gather horsemen and shielded warriors in hosts, harnessed in flashing bronze" (tr. Gow 1952).

Arete begins her defense of Medea by reminding Alcinous that they have close ties with the neighboring Haemonians, whereas Aeëtes is far away and they know little about him (4.1073-77). She appeals to her husband's sense of fairness and political expedience, arguing that since they must choose sides in the matter, they ought to take the side of the Argonauts, who represent the interests of their neighbors.²⁸ The suggestion of a possible alliance with the Greeks contrasts with Homer's isolationist Phaeacians, and was probably due to the positive identification of Scheria (Drepane in the *Argonautica*) with Corcyra, which is not far off the coast of the mainland (Thucydides 1.25.4). Secondly, Arete recapitulates Medea's earlier speech in order to forestall the possible objection that the girl might be unworthy of their help. She notes Medea's pitiable suffering and shifts the blame for her misdeeds and misfortunes to *Atê* and human frailty (4.1077-83). The third portion of Arete's argument rests on pious obligation (4.1083-87). Jason has

²⁵ Hunter 1993:71: "Apollonius 'writes' this missing scene for us."

²⁶ The council of kings (*basileis*) meets and feasts daily in the palace (7.95-99). Alcinous is preparing to meet with it when Nausicaa asks for permission to do the washing (6.53-55).

²⁷ Alcinous' confidence is due also to the "unbreakable oaths" the Colchians have sworn prior to his judgment (4.1205); see Byre 1997:73 and Fränkel 1968:577.

²⁸ See the scholiast's note on *Arg.* 4.982-92a.

sworn to marry Medea, so if they allow her to be taken he will necessarily compromise his oath. Finally, she closes with a reminder of the irrational passion to which fathers are particularly subject (4.1087-95). They must interfere, she argues, because Aeëtes would mistreat his daughter in the manner of other excessively jealous fathers. In sum, Arete claims that they must intervene on the grounds of sympathy, respect for the gods, and Phaeacian political ties.

Although Arete frames her argument according to what she sees as Phaeacian self-interest, she is willing to accept war as the price for the protection of Medea. Alcinous is sympathetic, but he is clearly more concerned for the international consequences of the decision (4.1098-1109):

“Arete, I could even use force to banish
the Colchians, obliging the heroes for the sake of the girl,
but I am apprehensive of dishonoring the straight judgment of Zeus;
nor would it be a very good idea to treat Aeëtes lightly, as you suggest,
since no one is more imperious than Aeëtes,
and despite the distance he would willingly engage in war with Greece.
Therefore it seems right to make a decision that will
be best in the opinion of all men. I will not hide it from you:
If she is still a virgin, I order that they take her back to her father.
But if she shares the bed with her husband
I will not separate her from her spouse, nor will I give their enemies
her child, should she be carrying one in her womb.”

Rather than choosing to side with the Greeks in the event of a conflict, as Arete has advised, Alcinous wishes to make a decision that will avoid war. Arete’s allegiance to her Greek allies is commendable, but she lacks Alcinous’ dedication to peace. This difference seems to me to be of critical importance insofar as the poet seems to be describing (or prescribing) a division of labor in the royal administration: the queen is a strong lobbyist, but she is less concerned than the king to devise diplomatic solutions (Vian 1981:48). If, as I suggested earlier, the poet is commenting on the Ptolemaic monarchy, this distinction would imply that Arsinoë’s sympathy for her favorites similarly affected her foreign policy (Hauben 1982).

After the discussion, Alcinous immediately falls asleep (4.1110), and Arete secretly instructs her herald to tell Jason that he must marry Medea that night (4.1111-20). We should not judge Arete’s “deception” too harshly. While Vian describes this scene as a quotidian revision of Hera’s deception of Zeus (*Διὸς ἀπάτη*) in an anti-epic register (1981:ad 1072), we must remember that in contrast to Hera’s plot, Arete does not use sex as a distraction, and her plans do not contravene those of Alcinous. We have

seen that Alcinous intentionally revealed his judgment to Arete before it became public, although he could hardly fail to be aware of her partisanship. The fact that Alcinous falls asleep almost instantaneously after the discussion further suggests that he expects her to act, and leaves her ample opportunity to do so. The extent to which Alcinous knowingly colludes in the wedding is not made explicit, but there is no indication later in the poem that he is disturbed by Arete's intervention.²⁹ Nor is the wedding kept secret for long, since Hera immediately starts a rumor in order to spread the good news of the marriage to all the Phaeacians (4.1184-85). Thus, on the following morning, the crowd assembles not only to hear the judgment of Alcinous, but also to take part in the wedding celebration. The poet notes that one brings a ram and another a heifer, and that many others bring wine, robes, gold ornaments, and bridal gifts (4.1185-91). Their spontaneous generosity contrasts with the reluctance of the Homeric Phaeacians to provide gifts for Odysseus, and the abundant wealth of the kingdom evokes the *homonoia* that is characteristic of the idyllic rule of Alcinous and Arete in Apollonius (Vian 1974:16-17).³⁰ Despite, or perhaps more accurately, as a result of their conflicting spheres of interest (Medea's safety vs. diplomatic neutrality) the two rulers orchestrate a peaceful resolution.

The *muthos* of Arete

I have argued up to this point that, in comparison with her portrait in the *Odyssey*, Arete's authority has been eclipsed in the *Argonautica*. Arete explains her concerns privately to Alcinous, but it is he who will speak authoritatively in the assembly. Alcinous is the ruling judge of the Phaeacians (4.1177-79): "In his hand he held the golden scepter of justice, with which many people decided the just settlements (*themistas*) in the city."³¹ As in the *Odyssey*, "the deed and the word" seem to belong to Alcinous.

²⁹ Cf. Zeus' angry response to Hera's trickery at *Il.* 15.14-33.

³⁰ Note the Argonauts' dedication of a Temple to Homonoia (*Arg.* 2.718).

³¹ Fränkel's 1961 OCT edition follows the mss. ᾠ ὑπο πολλοί for ᾠ ὑπο λαοί at line end. Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 84-87 on the just king: "The people (οἱ δέ τε λαοί) / all acknowledge him as he settles disputes / with straight justice. Speaking without hesitation / he would quickly and skillfully put an end to even a great conflict."

I do not believe, however, that the question of the respective responsibilities of Arete and Alcinous ends here. Arete does not speak publicly, but her contribution to the resolution is publicly acknowledged. During the wedding celebration, a chorus of nymphs joins Orpheus in singing and dancing. They spontaneously honor Hera for inspiring Arete to disclose the “wise word” of Alcinous. By assigning a role in the court intrigue to Hera, the nymphs reveal the divine motivation and sanction for Arete’s actions (4.1197-1200).³²

Then sometimes
they sang without him [Orpheus] swirling about in a circle,
in your honor, Hera, for you gave Arete the idea
of declaring the wise word [*pukinon epos*] of Alcinous.

The narrator is referring, of course, to the *pukinon epos* that is expressed by Alcinous in response to Arete’s *muthos* during the bedroom council (4.1096-97). The narrator uses the same phrase (*pukinon epos*) to describe Alcinous’ speech as Arete takes it to heart at the conclusion of their conversation (4.1111).³³ As we have seen, Arete then instructs her herald to tell Jason to marry Medea. This herald takes the *epos* of Alcinous, which has now become the *muthos* of Arete, to the Argonauts (4.1121-23): “His feet bore him swiftly from the hall, so that he might report the *muthos* of Arete to Jason.” Finally, when the Argonauts hear the *muthos*, they are delighted that the crisis is likely to be resolved without bloodshed (4.1126-27), since they have vowed to defend Medea by force if necessary (4.1053-57). *Muthos*, like *epos*, designates speech, yet Apollonius consistently uses the term *epos* to refer to the speech of Alcinous, and *muthos* to refer to Arete’s plans.

Apollonius employs *epos* and *muthos* approximately the same number of times (61 and 63 occurrences respectively), and it is not surprising that both terms also tend to occur more frequently in the last half of the poem, the two critical books after Medea joins the Argonauts. What is the force of the distinction between these two terms? Richard Martin’s study of the use of *epos* and *muthos* in the *Iliad* concludes that they refer to different types of

³² Their praise is easily transferred to Arsinoë herself, given her ideological identification with Arete and the Olympian in her marriage as well as her cult titles. See Fraser 1972: I, 237-38.

³³ The phrase *pukinon epos* signifies a message whose import will profoundly alter the course of events if it is properly transmitted (Foley 1991:154-56).

speech acts.³⁴ Using terminology drawn from Prague school linguistics, Martin defines *epos* as the generic term, referring to brief speeches in which the emphasis falls on the message that is conveyed by the speaker. The private conversation between a husband and a wife, like that of Alcinous and Arete, would accordingly fall into the category of *epos*.³⁵ A *muthos*, by contrast, is heavily marked, bearing greater semantic weight across a narrower range of expression. It refers to an authoritative speech act that takes place in public, reflects the powerful position of the speaker, and leads to definitive action. Thus, the less weighted term *epos* may be used in place of *muthos*, while the reverse is never the case. *Muthos* inherently implies significant speech and, accordingly, we find that Apollonius qualifies the transparent, unmarked *epos* with adjectives roughly twice as often as he does *muthos* (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Modifiers of *Epos* and *Muthos*

Rate of occurrence	Percentage
Adjectives	
<i>Epos</i> (25/61)	41%
<i>Muthos</i> (15/63)	24%
Pronominal adjectives	
<i>Epos</i> + <i>toion</i> (15/61)	25%
<i>Muthos</i> + <i>toion</i> (7/63)	11%
Possessive, interrogative pronouns	
<i>Epos</i> + <i>emoisi</i> (1/61)	1.6%
<i>Muthos</i> + <i>hemeterous</i> , <i>teon</i> , <i>poion</i> (3/63)	4.7%
Totals	
<i>Epos</i> (41/61)	67%
<i>Muthos</i> (25/63)	39%

³⁴ Martin 1989:12-14, 22-26, 37-42. Martin's analysis focuses on the direct discourse of Achilles, but I consider his findings worth consideration in this context as well.

³⁵ Martin 1989:37-38. Apollonius uses *pukinon* ("wise," "well-constructed") to describe Alcinous' speech. This adjective distinguishes "the best kind of *epos*" (35). Cf. Nagy 1997:119-25 on the marginalization of *muthos* as a speech act in post-Homeric literature (e.g., Pindar).

The contrast between the marked *muthos* and the unmarked *epos* is pronounced during three episodes in particular: the assembly of the Lemnian women; the meeting of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite; and Arete's speech to Alcinous. In all three of these scenes, *epos* emphasizes a speech *qua* verbal speech, whereas *muthos* is an important, authoritative plan that is verbally expressed and causes action that is critical to the plot. During the Lemnian assembly, the nurse Polyxo's plan to welcome the Argonauts is referred to as *muthos* (1.698). The attendant speeches of Hypsipyle and the people, on the other hand, are each called *epos* (1.699, 1.705, 1.714). Similarly, during the meeting of Hera and Athene with Aphrodite (3.1-110), Hera's description of her plan is called a *muthos* (3.24, 34-35), which contrasts with Athena's more general term for the speech (*epos*) she will make to Aphrodite (3.35).

The contrast between these two terms is most strongly felt at 4.1096-97. Apollonius calls Alcinous' response to Arete an *epos*, and describes her speech to him with the plural of *muthos*: "His mind delighted in the *muthoi* of his wife, and he made the following *epos*."³⁶ Apollonius highlights the contrast between the words by juxtaposing them on opposite sides of the caesura. This opposition suggests the different perspectives of the two speakers. Alcinous is engaged in a private conversation, an *epos*, with his wife. But for Arete, who does not speak in the assembly, her appeal to her husband is marked as political, public discourse: it is the dramatic equivalent of Arete's address to the Phaeacians in *Odyssey* 11. The royal status of the speakers and the politically charged content of their discussion evidently complicate the distinction between private, marital *epos* and public *muthos*.

Although the *muthos* of Arete takes place in the bedroom, it commands the attention of the (literate) audience of the poem just as an oral traditional scene involving a public speech would have done. The written composition of the *Argonautica* may well have affected or rather created a narratological distinction between public and private speech. We find a much higher incidence of indirect discourse, for example, in Apollonius than in Homer.³⁷ Oral epic favored direct discourse and used it to dramatic effect in the public performance of the poem, as the poet publicly recited speeches framed by narrative contexts like an assembly. By contrast, indirect discourse hints at secrecy and hidden meaning, because the narrator only

³⁶ τοῦ δὲ φρένες ἰαίνοντο / ἧς ἀλόχου μύθοισιν, ἔπος δ' ἐπὶ τοῖον ἔειπεν. Apollonius repeats the *epos* phrase in a formulaic manner later in the poem (4.738), but in this instance the contrast with *muthos* is significant.

³⁷ On the extended use of indirect speech in written epic, see Hunter 1993:143-44. For other characteristics of written composition, see Hunter 1989:41-42.

paraphrases the speaker's actual words (Hunter 1993:143-45). Apollonius' audience witnesses the iterative regression of the private conversation first overheard in the royal bedroom. The narrator indirectly reports Arete's secret plan as she instructs the herald, who then relates both her plan and the counsel of Alcinous in still more abbreviated form to the Argonauts (4.1110-23). The secret, indirectly reported *muthos* of Arete is thus demonstrably as crucial for the resolution of the crisis as the publicly announced *epos* of Alcinous. It may even be said to steal its dramatic thunder, since the narrator does not bother to report Alcinous' *epos* at all, noting simply that he remained firm in his judgment and compelled the Colchians to accept his terms (4.1201-10). The public eloquence of kings and poets whose sweet *epea* can dissolve disputes and sorrows (Hesiod, *Theogony* 80-103) is thus measured against a written poetry, inspired and composed behind the scenes, in a bedroom or a library, and only later sung.

Conclusion

Apollonius divides the Phaeacian monarchy into two branches: one that satisfies public expectations of justice and another that works indirectly and through hidden channels. On the one hand, the authority of Alcinous' *epos* inheres in its performance as a judgment; his public declaration enacts and confirms his juridical power over the Phaeacians, Argonauts, and Colchians alike. There is no need of an Echeneus to declare that "the deed and the word" belong to Alcinous. On the other hand, the iterability of the bedroom *epos* of Alcinous invests Arete with a significant measure of power as well. Apollonius' representation of Arete therefore has tempting implications for our interpretation of Arsinoë's influence.³⁸ The Homeric Arete speaks publicly, but Apollonius praises Arete for quietly plotting with and through the diplomatically conservative Alcinous, just as Arsinoë may have done with Ptolemy. Arete's portrait can be taken as a gloss on Arsinoë's tactics: she is possibly being criticized for openly wielding power or, more probably, given Apollonius' high status, praised for her generous patronage.

Using Martin's distinction between the unmarked *epos* and the marked, authoritative *muthos*, we see that the terms of Alcinous' private *epos* are transferable and exchangeable; Arete appropriates it when she advises Jason to marry Medea. Her directive preempts the declaration of

³⁸ See Nagy 1997:132-33 on the anthropological connection between epic speech acts (i.e., myths) and social realities.

Alcinous' *epos*, which will not be revealed as the ruling of the king until the following morning. Arete's *muthos*, which includes the details of Alcinous' decision as well as plans for the wedding, is at once secret, proper, and authoritative. The rescue of Medea and the resolution of the conflict are due as much to Arete's intervention as to Alcinous' public announcement. Despite the initial secrecy surrounding the *muthos* of Arete, she is eventually credited for her role in the resolution of the conflict, since, as we noted above, the chorus praises Hera for inspiring Arete to disclose Alcinous' decision (4.1199-1200). Hera's rumor has done its work, and Arete's *muthos* is eventually expressed in civic discourse. In the *Argonautica* we see the possibility of a legitimate role for court intrigue within an ideal monarchy, one in which the queen's appropriation of an *epos* intended for public expression does not compromise her political reputation. It may even be said to improve it, since Arete is celebrated for transmitting Alcinous' *pukinon epos*. For Apollonius, the *epos* may belong to Alcinous, but the *muthos* belongs to Arete, and the deed, ultimately, belongs to Hera.³⁹

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