

## Virgin or not?: Diana, Hecate, and Luna in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

In Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Diana's conflation with Hecate and Luna results in incongruences that erode her archetypal virginity and make her vulnerable to the power of Venus. I argue that Valerius manipulates the tension between Diana's three personas to symbolize her priestess Medea's progression from virginal witch to lover. Furthermore, the goddess's own chaste reputation is compromised by Apollonian intertexts referring to Luna's amorous adventures. I conclude by suggesting that this attack against Diana's virginity reflects the anxiety surrounding the purity of elite women, especially the Vestal Virgins, in the Flavian period.

The Apollonian and Vergilian influences in isolated scenes involving Diana, Hecate, and Luna have been noted in commentaries (Wijsman 2000, Baier 2001, Spaltenstein 2005) and articles (Fucecchi 1996, Battistella and Milić 2019). While Battistella and Milić 2019 discuss Hecate at length, their goal is to analyze Valerius' manipulation of generic conventions and thus they focus on the proleptic content of her words, which look forward to the tragic future. No one has yet traced the triform goddess's narrative arc within the *Argonautica*, nor has anyone discussed the pervasive attack on her virginal reputation and the possible sociopolitical reasons for it.

Brief mentions in the first half of the *Argonautica* establish the merging of Diana/Hecate/Luna (e.g. 1.781, 2.56-57, 3.193-196), but only in Book 5 does the goddess become prominent as patron of Medea. Medea is consistently associated with Diana/Hecate and with chastity more broadly (5.238-239, 335, 379, etc.) as she resists Jason's charms. In *Argonautica* 6, however, Medea begins to succumb to the power of Venus's girdle, and Hecate

weeps over her priestess's fate. Hecate's lament (6.495-502) echoes both Diana's grief for Camilla in *Aeneid* 11 and, more oddly, the Moon's vindictive joy at Medea's humiliation in Apollonius, *Argonautica* 4. Valerius' Hecate and Vergil's Diana are intertextually united in their support for Medea, but Apollonius' Selene rejoices to see the priestess undergoing the pangs of love (4.54-65). Selene's antagonism stems from her own desire for the mortal Endymion, a desire which she blames on Medea. Thus the Moon's own past inability to resist the pull of love (4.60) contrasts with the Valerian Hecate's virginity and provides an odd undercurrent to Hecate's speech.

The full ramifications of the Apollonian intertext emerge in Valerius, *Argonautica* 7, where Venus claims that she could force not only Medea, *but also* Hecate, to sleep with Jason (179-186). Hecate's powerlessness to save Medea confirms Venus's boast, as does the Apollonian allusion. In a way, Venus *has already* subordinated Hecate—in the guise of Selene/Luna—to the embraces of Endymion. The subtle undermining of Diana/Hecate's virginal reputation is completed in *Argonautica* 8, when Medea—finally surrendering to her passion—flees from the palace to escape with Jason. The lovers are compared to Luna and Endymion (8.27-31) in a simile that symbolizes Medea's erotic awakening at the same time as it emphasizes Diana/Hecate's disgraceful hidden life as the sexually active Luna. Hecate fails to maintain her own virginity and thus is powerless to aid Medea. This reflection on virginal corruption, grounded in the debasement of a chaste goddess, is a symptom of the broader Flavian discourse about religious reform and female morality.

## Bibliography

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