

A Ptolemaic Thetis in Apollonius' *Argonautica*

In this paper I argue that Apollonius alters the behavior and narrative role of Thetis in connection with the Ptolemaic reconceptualization of the sea and sea deities (Clayman 2014, Hunter 1993, Mori 2008, Stephens 2003, Thalmann 2011). Scholarship on Apollonius' representation of the sea goddess Thetis, Achilles' divine mother, in the *Argonautica* has focused on her interviews with Peleus and Hera, particularly Hera's rhetorical manipulation of Thetis. I begin by arguing that Thetis' success in protecting the Argonauts is explicitly contrasted with her failure to protect Achilles in the *Iliad*. Slatkin 1991 demonstrates the duality of the Iliadic Thetis, whose inability to save her son is a source of enervating sorrow and powerful wrath. In my view the *Argonautica* retains this duality by presenting Thetis from a Homeric perspective, exemplified by her meeting with Peleus (4.854-65), even as she is reimagined as the savior of the Argonauts (4.928-60). Where Homer's Thetis, like Calypso and Aphrodite, is associated with veils, clouds, and concealment (Slatkin 1986), the Argonautic Thetis is associated with light and visibility, her brightness emphasized in a number of ways, including Apollonius' (unhomeric) application of the adjective δῖα ("bright," "shining") to her. Thetis' efficacy in the *Argonautica* is therefore enhanced by the loss she has yet to experience, while the dark pathos of her Homeric future deepens in contrast to the brilliance of her agency in Apollonius.

Thetis' dynamic role in the *Argonautica* is connected, in my view, with a larger reconceptualization of the sea, a sea change that points to the cult role of the Ptolemaic queen Arsinoe II Philadelphus (Arsinoe-Aphrodite at Zephyrium) as protector of sailors. None of the Argonauts is lost at sea; the mysterious fate of Hylas, abducted by an

amorous freshwater nymph (1.1234-40) is balanced by Aphrodite's rescue of Butes, who very nearly drowns off the coast of Sicily (4.917-919). The beneficent sea deities of the *Argonautica* contrast markedly with the hostile Poseidon of the *Odyssey* (Clare 2002), while the dangers of sea travel, a central concern of Hellenistic shipwreck epigrams (Gutzwiller 1998), are largely depersonalized.

The second part of the paper accordingly looks more closely at Apollonius' characterization of the Zephyr as a favoring wind, one that regularly aids the Argonauts either alone or in cooperation with other winds. The Zephyr is linked with the Ptolemaic cult of Arsinoe-Aphrodite, whose temple was located on the promontory of Zephyrion between Alexandria and Canopus. Callimachus hails Arsinoe as "Kypris of Zephyrion" and "Zephyritis" (*Ep.* 5 Pfeiffer =14 GP quoted by Athen.7.318b; *Aitia* 4 fr. 110.50-58). Similarly, other Hellenistic poets emphasize the role of Aphrodite and Arsinoe with safe sea passages (e.g., Anyte *PA* 9.144 Posidippus 39 AB 2002). Apollonius' association of the Zephyr with Thetis likely owes something to its representation of in the *Odyssey*, where it is often associated with the gods; but in the *Iliad* the Zephyr is regularly characterized as violent and destructive. Both the efficacy of Apollonius' Thetis and her association with the Zephyr are thus poetic acknowledgements of the crucial role of the cult of Arsinoe-Aphrodite in the protection of the Ptolemaic maritime empire.

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