

The law thus illustrates an important and far from novel aspect of imperial ideology. Although a petitioner may have paid in order to be heard by the emperor,

he did not (in theory) gain his request except on its merits.

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VALERIUS FLACCUS 2. 428–50

The significance of the insertion of the brief narrative of the initiation of the Argonauts into the mysteries of the Cabeiri on Samothrace seems never to have been explained adequately by commentators. What is proposed here is an interpretation which seeks to explain the thematic significance of this brief episode in the total structure of the poem. The passage in question is based on Apollonius Rhodius 1. 910–21. The Greek version of the episode is much briefer. Apollonius simply says that the Argonauts stop at Electra's island and are initiated into the mysteries so that they may sail over the seas with greater safety. The poet declines to comment further, observing that it is forbidden for mortals to discuss or inquire into these holy rites.

Valerius Flaccus has, first of all, expanded the episode to twice the length of the Greek version, allowing himself enough lines to develop it more adequately and to make its significance more clear. In both Apollonius and Valerius the stop at Samothrace follows immediately after the Lemnian episode. It is suggested here that the introduction of the Samothrace episode at this point is not a bit of pedantry or antiquarian lore added as mere filler, as so many of the digressions in the Greek *Argonautica* seem to be; rather, it is closely related thematically to the rest of the poem, and to the preceding Lemnian episode in particular.

A major theme running throughout the Latin *Argonautica* is the notion that this voyage of the Argo is a divinely sanctioned endeavor in which these proto-navigators, with the help of the gods, travel over the sea, a medium previously forbidden to men. Their task is a difficult, and at times discouraging, one. On some occasions they

doubt the lawfulness of what they are doing, and at other times they do not remain faithful to their mission. Soon after the start of the voyage they are caught in a violent storm and are almost killed. The Lemnian episode is their second major hurdle. Here they are threatened not by physical danger, as they were in the storm, but rather by the distraction of sensual allurements. The life of ease and domestic luxury offered by the Lemnian women seems all too attractive in contrast to the difficulties involved in pushing on to Colchis. Hercules rebukes them and calls them back to their appointed task. It is at this point, after the Argonauts have passed through two major trials, that the stop at Samothrace occurs. In the interpretation suggested here, this visit involves not only initiation, but also purification, forgiveness, and encouragement for the future.

Valerius, like Apollonius, stresses the air of mystery surrounding the island and the arcane nature of the rites which are celebrated there: "hic numinis ingens / horror et incautis decreta piacula linguis" (432–33).¹ The lines which follow, however, are original with Valerius:

hanc demissa Iovi non umquam laedere fluctu
audet hiems; sponte ipse deus tunc asperat undas
cum vetat infidos sua litora tangere nautas
[434–36].

Samothrace, because it is the site of the mysteries of the Cabeiri, is exempt from the ordinary vicissitudes of the weather. *Demissa Iovi* . . . *hiems* in this context may be taken to mean a storm which occurs in the regular course of weather. The resident deity has the power to stir up his own storm when he wants to forbid *infidos* . . . *nautas* from

1. The Latin text of the *Argonautica* used here is that of E. Courtney (Leipzig, 1970).

approaching his shores. *Infidus* is used here in a specifically religious sense, suggesting persons who have not been initiated into the mysteries, or persons whom the god will not deign to admit to them. At the same time, in the context of the *Argonautica*, it recalls the notion, so prominent in Book 1, that all sailors are *infidi* simply because they have dared to venture onto the forbidden paths of the sea. *Vetat . . . tangere* likewise points to the sacrosanct nature of the island. Sailors are forbidden even to touch the island, as a *profanus* would be forbidden to touch the sacred objects of a religious cult. Even a storm sent by Jupiter does not "dare" to harm the island. *Audeo* is a key word in the poem, always suggesting the boldness involved in sailing (cf. 1. 3). The island of Samothrace, like the sea, is untouchable.

In the light of all this, what is significant here is the reception given to the Argonauts by the priest Thyotes. *At Minyas* in 437 signals an important change of tone: "obvius at Minyas terris adytisque sacerdos / excipit hospitibus reserans secreta Thyotes" (437–38). Whereas other sailors are forbidden to touch Samothrace, the Argonauts are warmly received. The special nature of their mission wins for them special consideration. Thyotes does not merely allow the Minyae to land at Samothrace; he takes the initiative and goes out to meet them (*obvius*, 437). He receives them in *terris adytisque . . . hospitibus*. The forbidden island and even the secret shrine of the gods are hospitable to the Argonauts. Thyotes greets them *reserans secreta* (438). This phrase is to be contrasted with *arcana* in 432 and *sacris . . . opertis* in 440.

Having said this much, Valerius, like Apollonius, declares that it is not permitted to speak further of these holy mysteries: "hactenus in populos, mater Samothracia divum, / missa mane, sacrisque metum servemus opertis" (439–40). Valerius emphasizes the happiness of the Argonauts at this point and the spiritual transformation which they have experienced. This happiness con-

trasts with the sadness which they felt at the end of the preceding Lemnian episode. Their happiness is due to *sole novo* (441). Clearly this term is not to be taken literally, but rather refers to the enlightenment which the Argonauts have received in their initiation. The phrase is effective because it is part of the pattern of light imagery here. The mysteries of the Cabeiri have been revealed *in diem* (439); and, as the Argonauts sail away, the bright sun in mid-course has climbed to its *aetherias . . . arces* (444). This light imagery helps to effect a change of tone from the sadness felt before the arrival at Samothrace to the buoyant and exuberant mood which characterizes the Argonauts afterward.

On the basis of the preceding analysis we can proceed to offer an explanation of the significance of the Samothrace episode in the Latin *Argonautica*. First of all, the episode involves initiation. In mystery cults the devotee is brought into the presence of something which he has not experienced before and is allowed to experience it for the first time. A major theme of this poem is novelty. The whole Argonautic voyage is an initiation into the mysteries of the sea. It is suggested here that the island of Samothrace in this poem stands for sea travel. Just as the island is forbidden to *nautae* in general, but is opened to the Argonauts, so the sea, previously closed to men, is now being opened up to these pioneer navigators. It is in fact the whole sea, not just Samothrace, which men have been forbidden to touch. The Cabeiri were thought of as having the power to grant a safe journey over the sea.² Here, they are seen to be granting the very first journey. Thus they are in effect the agents of the will of Jupiter, who has willed this voyage. Moreover, Castor and Pollux, who are members of the crew of the *Argo*, were later identified with the Cabeiri.³ Therefore the Argonauts, represented by the Dioscuri, will in a sense come to perform the function of the Cabeiri, as they are pointing out to future generations the possibility of sea

2. For a general discussion of the Cabeiri, see Bloch, "Megaloi Theoi," in Roscher, *Lex.*, II, 2522–41. and Kern, s.v. "Kabeiros und Kabeiroi," in *RE*, X (1919), 1399.

3. On the relation of the Dioscuri to the Cabeiri, see Diod. 4. 43.

travel. The poet looks forward to this function of Castor and Pollux when the flame sent as an omen by Jupiter is called "lumen . . . miseris olim implorabile nautis" (572–73). Moreover, the mysteries of the Cabeiri involved sexual initiation. It may be suggested, at least tentatively, that Valerius also intended his readers to associate this aspect of the rites of the Cabeiri with the preceding Lemnian episode. In that episode the Argonauts had a serious sexual encounter. Many of them are young and unmarried, and this episode may well be intended as their initiation into the mysteries of Venus.⁴ The Lemnian episode may be seen as a study in the power of erotic love. The stop at Samothrace then can be seen as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the mysteries into which they have just been introduced.⁵

In the second place the Samothrace episode involves purification. There is no specific reference to purification, but in general such religious rites involve catharsis. Although the stop at Lemnos was willed by Jupiter, the Argonauts are not without guilt, because they stayed longer than necessary there and neglected their mission. The warm reception given to them by Thyotes and their subsequent admission into the rites of the Cabeiri suggest that they have not lost the favor of the gods. They leave

Samothrace reinvigorated and prepared to face the tasks which lie ahead.⁶

Closely related to the notion of purification is that of justification. In Book 1 the great anxiety of the Argonauts was that they were breaking the divine law by attempting to sail. They interpreted the storm which assailed them as an indication that the gods were angry at them. The calming of the storm was taken as tentative proof that they had not incurred the divine wrath after all (1. 608–92). Now, their acceptance on the island which "faithless sailors" (*infidos . . . nautas*) are forbidden to approach may be seen as a divine ratification of what they are attempting to do. They are happy when they leave Samothrace because the fears which have haunted them have been allayed completely and they are reassured that they have not run afoul of the gods.

Finally, the stop at Samothrace gives the Argonauts encouragement for the future. They have just been through two difficult and painful experiences—the storm and the Lemnian episode. In both of these experiences, for different reasons, they lost interest in continuing their voyage. They left Lemnos *inter lacrimas* (428), but now they are *laeti*, filled with *sole novo* and with the will to push on to Colchis.

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4. For a similar interpretation of the Lemnian episode in Apollonius, see G. Lawall, "Apollonius' *Argonautica*: Jason as Anti-hero," *YCS*, XIX (1966), 119–69.

5. Lemnos, like Samothrace, was a center for the rites of the Cabeiri. In fact, the rites are supposed to have originated there. This traditional association of the Cabeiri with Lemnos makes it all the more likely that Valerius intended these two episodes to be linked together.

6. This interpretation receives support from the fact that after the tragic Cyzican episode, in which the Argonauts accidentally kill their hosts, a ritual purification takes place (3. 377–448). In both cases the Argonauts have done something wrong and must be purified and restored to the favor of the gods before they can continue their journey.

PAX PALAMEDES

"In summo habuimus caseum mollem ex sapa et cocleas singulas et cordae frusta et hepatia in catillis et ova pilleata et rapam et senape et catillum concacatum, pax Palamedes" (Petron. *Sat.* 66. 7). Friedlaender¹

took *pax Palamedes* to be an alliterative conceit. A popular explanation.² And it could be right, for Habinnas, the speaker, is *ebrius*; drunken jingle would be stylistically appropriate.

1. In his edition of the *Cena* (Leipzig, 1891), p. 299.

2. See, e.g., W. D. Lowe's edition of the *Cena* (Cambridge, 1905), *ad loc.*: "*pax Palamedes* is alliterative and arbitrary." Also, M. Heseltine's Loeb edition (London, 1913), p. 127:

"the meaning of its [*sc. pax*'] conjunction with the word *Palamedes* is unknown; it may merely be due to the charm of alliteration."