

Beginning with You, Selene: Apollonius' Allusion to *Hom. Hymn* 32.18–19 in *Arg.* 1.1–2

It has long been recognized that the opening words of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, “Beginning with you, Phoebus, I shall recall the famous deeds of men born long ago” (Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν | μνήσομαι, *Arg.* 1.1–2; trans. Race 2008), are modeled on the envoi of the *Homeric Hymn to Selene*: “Beginning from you [Selene], I will sing of famous tales of heroes” (σέο δ' ἀρχόμενος κλέα φωτῶν | ᾄσομαι ἡμιθέων, *Hom. Hymn* 32.18–19; trans. West 2003). Together with the hymnic salutation to the Argonauts at the end of the poem (4.1773–1775), this allusion constitutes the *Argonautica*'s “hymnic frame,” which structures the poem as something of a *Hymn to the Argonauts* in the mold of the *Homeric Hymns* (cf. Hunter 1996: 46). Unfortunately, however, scholarly analysis has largely stopped here; commentators have been more struck by Apollonius' allusion to a generic *Homeric Hymn* than by his particular allusion to the *Homeric Hymn to Selene*. Accordingly, this paper seeks to probe the nuances of Apollonius' opening allusion by engaging with its context in *Selene* and that hymn's companion piece, the *Homeric Hymn to Helios* (31). As I will argue, Apollonius' choice of *Selene* 18–19 hints at the epic's romantic-erotic theme, which is otherwise occluded in the introit (1.1–22), but his manipulation of his model subtly anticipates the conflict between Colchian and Greek civilization as a clash of old world and new, Titans and Olympians.

The first point to make is that Apollonius chooses *Selene* 18–19 as his model, even though an equivalent phrase was available to him in *Helios* 18–19: “After beginning from you [Helios], I will celebrate the brood of mortal heroes, whose deeds the gods have disclosed to mankind” (ἐκ σέο δ' ἀρξάμενος κλήισω μερόπων γένος ἀνδρῶν | ἡμιθέων, ὧν ἔργα θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ἔδειξαν). The question is, why is *Selene* more suitable for the poet's project than *Helios*? Both hymns would seem properly epic, insofar as they, uniquely among the *Homeric*

Hymns, reveal themselves as preludes to an explicitly epic performance centered on heroic deeds. The answer seems to lie in the difference in the two poems' aesthetics. As Hall 2013: 26–27 has recently observed, the envoi of *Helios* emphasizes epic's status as divine revelation, while *Selene* characterizes the genre by its loveliness: bards glorify heroic deeds “from [the Muses'] enchanting mouths” (ἀπὸ στομάτων ἐροέντων, 20). Moreover, the hymns are consistently gendered (e.g., Helios' chariot team is comprised of explicitly ἄρσενες ἵπποι, [31.13], Selene's, of πόλους [32.9]), so that a feminine Selene complements her masculine counterpart Helios. By adapting *Selene* rather than *Helios*, Apollonius appears to choose the erotic and the feminine as the aesthetic for his epic. In particular, by passing over the γένος ἀνδρῶν of the *Helios* envoi in favor of the gender-neutral κλέα φωτῶν from *Selene*'s, Apollonius leaves room for Medea and her central role in Books 3–4 (cf. Goldhill 1991: 288).

Thus Apollonius chooses *Selene* over *Helios*. The second major point, however, is that Apollonius chooses Phoebus Apollo over both of these gods—the referent of “you” in his Ἀρχόμενος σέο is not the moon goddess but Apollo in his luminous aspect, as the addition of the vocative Φοῖβε makes clear. To understand this substitution, it is best to turn to the relationship of these deities as characterized in the *Argonautica* itself. Hunter 1995: 18 has noted a persistent antipathy in the poem between the “new” sun god Phoebus, benefactor of Jason and the Argonauts, and the “old” sun god Helios, closely associated with his descendants Aeetes and Medea. The moon, moreover, is the “Titanian goddess” (Τιτηνὶς . . . | . . . θεὰ . . . Μήνη), much as Colchis itself is “Titanian Aea” (Τιτηνίδος Αἴης, 4.131), a primordial civilization with roots in Egypt (4.262–278), on par with the moon itself in antiquity (cf. 4.264). The linkage of the Sun and Moon with the Colchians exploits the Greek perception that these are ancient gods especially venerated by the barbarians (Aristophanes *Pax* 406–411, Plato *Crat.* 397c–d). Their replacement

by the young Olympian Apollo in the poem's opening allusion hints at the civilizational conflict at the heart of the Argonaut myth.

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