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APOLLONIUS RHODIUS 1.103: A DISCUSSION OF A NEW EMENDATION


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In Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.103, there are three textual variants for the adjective that accompanies the noun ὀδόν: κοινήν, κεινήν and κείνην. Recently, the emendation σκοτίνη has been suggested; a suggestion that is seemingly supported by a parallel in *Arg. Orph.* 41. It is argued here that this emendation is unwarranted and that probably either κεινήν or κείνην is authentic, whereby the two variants constitute wordplay that reinforces the ironic underlayer of the context. Further, it is demonstrated that *Arg. Orph.* 41 does not provide a convincing parallel and that it thus does not support the suggested emendation.

Keywords: Apollonius Rhodius; *Argonautica Orphica*; emendation; Theseus; Peirithous; catabasis; Underworld

In Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, in the catalogue of the Argonauts (1.20–233) a reference is made to Theseus and Peirithous, who were prevented from participating in the enterprise due to external circumstances (1.101–104):

Θησέα δ', ὃς περὶ πάντας Ἐρεχθεΐδας ἐκέκαστο,
Ταιναρίην αἰδηλος ὑπὸ χθόνα δεσμός ἔρυκε,
Πειρίθῳ ἐσπόμενον  — ὀδόν· ἦ τέ κεν ἄμφω
ῥήτερον καμάτιο τέλος πάντεσσιν ἔθεντο.¹

There are three textual variants for the adjective that accompanies the noun ὀδόν in line 103: some manuscripts have κοινήν (“shared”, “common”, “joint”), some κεινήν (“futile”, “vain”), and some others κείνην (“that”, “the well-known”).² Editors have given unequal

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preference to the three variants, as a look at the existing editions from the twentieth century reveals.³ In a recent publication, Boris Kayachev has argued that “the disagreement between the editors” should be regarded as a sign that “none [of the variants] is entirely satisfactory”: he considers κεινήν to be “somewhat redundant after ἐσπόμενον”; κεινήν, in turn, “is probably not the form Apollonius would have used in this metrical position”, and “to say that their journey to Hades was ‘futile’ is a bit of an understatement”; κείνην, finally, “cannot be ruled out, but will hardly be missed” (Kayachev 2020, 132). Instead, the scholar suggests the emendation σκοτήν (“dark”), which seemingly finds support in line 41 of the *Argonautica Orphica* in the phrase σκοτήν ὁδὸν Ἄϊδος εἶσω (“the dark path down into Hades”), a “passage [that] may well be based on the Apollonian one” (Kayachev 2020, 133).

In what follows, I will first challenge Kayachev’s dismissal of the manuscript tradition and will propose an interpretation of the passage in question that makes the authenticity of two of the three available variants very probable. Thereafter, I will demonstrate that the suggested emendation is not only unnecessary but also less likely than insinuated by its proponent.

To begin with, it should be noted that a feeling of redundancy, superfluousness or understatement can hardly count as a justification to alter the transmission of a given text. The only argument that has some weight is the objection to the form κεινήν because of its metrical position: “Elsewhere Apollonius uses forms of κενεός: 1.285; 2.254, 445; 3.126, 1120. A form of κεινός occurs only once at a verse-end: 3.1346” (Kayachev 2020, 132 n. 3).⁴ However, in view of the altogether few occurrences of the adjective in the *Argonautica*, it would seem exaggerated to take this argument as hard and fast evidence to legitimize an emendation. Moreover, as we will see later, there may be a good reason as to why Apollonius might have chosen a form of κεινός instead of a form of κενεός in this case.

Methodologically, in order to justify his conjecture, Kayachev points to Michael W. Haslam’s study of papyrus fragments of the *Argonautica*, where it is demonstrated that there are indeed cases of seemingly sound passages that, based on papyrological evidence, turn out to be corrupt. Haslam (1978, 48) is quoted as follows: “[The papyri] are a constant reminder that even an apparently sound text is not necessarily sound, that a conjecture does not have to be necessary in order to be true.” However, the quote is truncated and thus misleading – viewed in its context, its meaning is more nuanced:

It is a good general rule, even apart from the papyri, that our modern texts are in a worse condition than they appear to be. How could it be otherwise than that there are some corruptions which give no sign of being such? A practical rule among editors and critics is that the reading of the manuscripts should not be abandoned unless it has to be. But as E. J. Kenney has remarked, “There is an important difference between using the status quo as a methodological convenience and regarding it as true.” The papyri are a constant reminder that even an apparently sound text is not necessarily sound, that a conjecture does not have to be necessary in order to be true – though admittedly it has to be necessary in order to be *known* to be true.⁵

In other words, there are indeed cases where a seemingly sound text is proven to be corrupt by papyrological evidence, but to conclude that this allows for the alteration of a perfectly comprehensible passage without the support of any external evidence (be it papyrological or otherwise) would be a *non sequitur*. Haslam’s addition that a conjecture “has to be necessary in order to be *known* to be true” is the critical caveat.

Furthermore, the lack of editorial consensus does not automatically warrant an argument against the transmission. On the contrary, one should, in my opinion, also allow for the opposite conclusion, namely, that each variant may, actually, be convincing. While I agree with Kayachev that κοινήν is probably tautologous because an adjective meaning “common” that stands right after ἐσπόμενον is not semantically charged, I would consider both κεινήν and κείνην as viable options. *Arg.* 1.101–104 constitutes an allusion to the story of Theseus and Peirithous who descended to the Underworld in order to abduct Persephone because Peirithous foolishly wished to gain her as his new wife. The enterprise was, unsurprisingly, not successful, as the two heroes – after having been invited by Hades to take a seat – were no longer able to rise because the seats were sticking to their flesh. A passing reference to the catabasis of the two heroes can already be found in the *Nekyia* (*Od.* 11.631); the story as such was recounted in the fragmentarily preserved Hesiodic poem *Minyas* (Hes. fr. 280–281 M.-W.), and it was also popular on vase paintings.⁶ Thus, this humorous incident was indeed a “well-known” (κείνην) enterprise that turned out to be a “failure” (κεινήν).

At the end of the day, the crucial question that needs to be addressed concerns the overall function of the allusion to this failed catabasis at this point in the catalogue of the Argonauts. By alluding to this episode, the

Apollonian narrator justifies the omission of Theseus from the Argonautic enterprise – for, according to other sources, Theseus had, in fact, been an Argonaut.⁷ Simultaneously, the descent of the two also offers an ironic counter-image to the Argonautic expedition, which, in contrast to this failed catabasis, was eventually going to be a success. Yet unlike Theseus' and Peirithous' well-known adventure, Apollonius' version was, at the time of the catalogue unfolding, still unknown, so the Apollonian quest for the Golden Fleece is the opposite of the quest for Persephone also in this respect. Furthermore, the ironic undertone that lies in the allusion to Theseus' and Peirithous' unsuccessful catabasis also resonates in the phrase *καμάτοιο τέλος* in line 104.⁸ This phrase is unique in all existing Greek epic, and it is clearly based on the equally unique Homeric phrase *θανάτοιο τέλος* in *Il.* 3.309.⁹ There, Priam has just announced that he is not going to watch the duel between Paris and Menelaos (3.304–307), and he ends his brief speech with a reference to the omniscience of the gods (3.308–309):

Ζεὺς μὲν που τό γε οἶδε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι,
ὄποτέρῳ θανάτοιο τέλος πεπρόμενον ἔστιν.¹⁰

Through this intertextual reference, a Homeric context is evoked with which the Apollonian passage shares several similarities: the main topic is the same, namely, the realm of death, and in both cases, the retrieval (or recovery) of a bride is the motivation for the impending action. However, the imminent fight between Paris and Menelaos is a potential life-and-death struggle, whereas the catabasis of Theseus and Peirithous is an overall humorous incident. As a result of these similarities and dissimilarities, an ironic tension arises; the Apollonian narrator nods towards Homer and ironizes the story of Theseus' and Peirithous' catabasis by reference to a serious, non-ironic subtext.

In conclusion, I would like to argue that it is not only impossible for us to decide whether *κεινήν* or *κεινήν* should be deemed as the authentic reading, since both variants are equally conceivable, but that they in fact constitute wordplay that reinforces the ironic underlayer of the context. In other words, no matter whether Apollonius put *κεινήν* or *κεινήν* in his text, the other variant was most probably meant to be heard too.¹¹ At the same time, the assumption of such a pun also provides a convenient explanation as to why Apollonius did not use the variant

form *κενεός* in this case, which he otherwise would have used in this metrical position (see above).

But let us ignore all objections for a moment and consider whether *σκοτῆν* might be a valid option nonetheless, irrespective of whether an emendation of the passage in question is necessary or justified. First, it must be noted that the adjective *σκοτίος* is attested three times in the *Argonautica* (1.810; 3.1379; 4.60) and that the textual transmission is unambiguous in all of these cases, so one may wonder why the same word should have been corrupted in this one case.¹² Secondly, it appears unlikely that the transparent *σκοτῆν* should have been mistaken for something else as many as three times in three independent textual traditions.¹³ Thirdly, line 41 of the *Argonautica Orphica*, which Kayachev brings into play for external support, needs to be further evaluated. The narrator here mentions Orpheus' catabasis to the Underworld as follows (*Arg. Orph.* 40–42):

Ἄλλα δέ σοι κατέλεξ' ἅ περ εἴσιδον ἠδ' ἐνόησα,
 Ταινάρου ἠνίκ' ἔβην σκοτῆν ὁδὸν Ἄϊδος εἴσω
 ἡμετέρη πίσυνος κιθάρη, δι' ἔρωτ' ἀλόχοιο.¹⁴

Admittedly, at first sight this seems to be a tempting parallel. Kayachev rightly points out that the phrase *σκοτῆν ὁδὸν Ἄϊδος εἴσω* stands in the same metrical position as the corresponding phrase in *Arg.* 1.103 and that the mention of the Taenarian gateway (where the entrance to the Underworld was located) represents another common feature between the two passages. That being said, the danger that lies in such circular argumentation must not be underestimated: while there can be no doubt that Apollonius' *Argonautica* is an important subtext for the anonymous *Argonautica Orphica*,¹⁵ the alteration of an otherwise sound passage from the "model" text is not automatically justified because of this. Furthermore, the wider context and the deeper sense of the phrase *σκοτῆν ὁδὸν Ἄϊδος εἴσω* must be taken into account too: in the *Argonautica Orphica*, the phrase has a metaphorical connotation, insofar as Orpheus goes "the dark way" in order to retrieve his dead wife, whereas in *Arg.* 1.103 such a metaphorical association is absent. Moreover, on the literal level, the adjective *σκοτῆν* in the phrase *σκοτῆν ὁδὸν Ἄϊδος εἴσω* constitutes a hypallage: for, strictly speaking, it is the Underworld, and not the way there, that is dark. In *Arg.* 1.103, on the

other hand, a statement of location is missing, and thus the phrase σκοτὴν ὁδὸν would appear rather odd.

Kayachev (2020, 132 n. 5) produces three textual parallels in order to support his emendation, but in my opinion, they do not stand up to scrutiny upon closer inspection: *Od.* 24.9–10 ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν / Ἑρμείας ἀκάκητα κατ' εὐρώεντα κέλευθα (“and so he led them the way, / Hermes the healer, down the mouldy pathways”) cannot count as a parallel since the adjective εὐρώεις simply does not mean “dark”, but “mouldy” (despite the *Suda* s.v. εὐρώεντα· σκοτεινά, ζοφώδη).¹⁶ In turn, both *Cat.* 3.11–12 *qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum / illuc unde negant redire quemquam* (“now through the gloomy path he goes / thither where they say no one comes back from”) and *Sil.* 14.239–240 *hic specus ingentem laxans telluris hiatus / caecum iter ad manes tenebroso limite pandit* (“here a cave opens a vast chasm in the earth / and uncloses a blind path to the souls of the Dead by its dark passage”) do not *sensu lato* provide examples of “an apposite epithet to describe the path to the underworld” (Kayachev 2020, 132), but the reference to the dark path is a hypallage here too – it is, first and foremost, the Underworld that is imagined to be dark.

To conclude, the recently suggested emendation of *Arg.* 1.103 is not only unnecessary, but it must be rejected for methodological and interpretive reasons. However, the suggestion has not been futile, for it has contributed to a better understanding of *Arg.* 1.101–104: a passage that is full of irony and that provides the reason why Theseus has been omitted from the Argonautic enterprise, while the unsuccessful quest for Persephone simultaneously also constitutes a counter-image to the successful quest for the Golden Fleece.

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Notes

1. “But Theseus, who surpassed all sons of Erechtheus: / an invisible bond held him back below the land of Taenarus, / having followed Peirithous on the [...] path – alas, the two / would have made easier the fulfilment of the labour for all.” – The Greek text of Apollonius’ *Argonautica* is that by Vian and Delage (1974). All translations from Greek and Latin are mine.
2. For the details of the manuscript tradition, see the critical apparatus in the edition by Vian and Delage (1974). On the textual tradition of the *Argonautica*, see Fränkel (1929, 1964); Speake (1972); Vian and Delage (1974, XL–LXXII); Schade and Eleuteri (2008).
3. κοινήν: Mooney (1912); Fränkel (1961); Ardizzoni (1967); Pompella (2006). κείνην: Vian and Delage (1974); Race (2008); Dräger (2019). κείνην: Seaton (1912).
4. This was already noted by Brunck in his edition from 1780; see Mooney (1912, 76).
5. Emphasis in the original quote. The quote within the quote refers to Kenney (1974, 25).
6. See Gantz (1993, 291–295) for all textual and iconographic sources.
7. For details, see Vian and Delage (1974, 244); Dräger (2001, 99–101; 2019, 438, 504–505).
8. I owe this point to Anastasia Maravela.
9. The model character of the Iliadic phrase is reinforced through the same metrical position in the hexameter. τέλος θανάτοιο, in turn, is a more common phrase in the *Iliad* (5.553; 9.416; 11.451; 16.502; 16.855; 22.361).
10. “Zeus surely knows this and the other immortal gods, / for whom of the two the fulfilment of death is destined.” – The Greek text of the *Iliad* is that by van Thiel (1996).
11. As reflected in Paul Dräger’s translation: “weil er Peirithoos auf dem <bekanntem> nichtigen Weg gefolgt war” (Dräger 2019). The scholia too acknowledge both κείνην and κείνην; see Wendel (1935, 16). An intended pun between κείνην/ κείνην and κοινήν is considerably less likely because the phonemes represented by -ει- and -οι- do not appear to have merged in the Hellenistic period yet, as papyrological evidence demonstrates; see e.g. Gignac (1976, 197–199) and Horrocks (2014, 160–170). Later in the mediaeval tradition, however, κοινήν can easily be explained as a spelling mistake based on an iotacistic pronunciation of κείνην (or κείνην).
12. Further, we can find the noun σκοτή (4.1698) and the adjective σκοτώεις (2.1105). The textual transmission is uncorrupted in these cases too.
13. Kayachev (2020, 132) proposes “corruption triggered by the omission of the sigma”, but this is little convincing.
14. “And other things I have enumerated to you, which I saw and learnt, / when I came to the Taenarus, the dark path down into Hades, / confiding in my cithara, out of

love for my wife.” – The Greek text of the *Argonautica Orphica* is that by Vian (1987).

15. See e.g. Venzke (1941); Köhnken (2007); Schelske (2011, *passim*).

16. See *LfggE* and LSJ s.v.; also Beekes (2010) s.v. εὐρώς. The Suda entry cannot be taken at face value.

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