

The beginning of Catulus 64 - Peleus and Thetis / Ariadne and Theseus

The pine trees previously growing on Mt. Pelion's summit (near Iolcus!) are said to have floated on Neptune's clear waves to Phasis, land of Aetes, when the finest young men, the glory of Argive manpower, dared travel over the sea's briny waters on a rapidly moving ship as they swept the deep blue expanse with wooden oars, because they hoped to steal the Golden Fleece from Colchis. Athena, holding fast the citadels on the cities' summits for the Argonauts, made a ship that moves rapidly with a light gust of wind, joining pinewood frameworks for a curved keel.

The Argo first drenched the virgin sea with its travel; as soon as it ploughed with its beak the windy sea and the waves, white with spume and spun in an eddy by the rowing, the maritime Nereids raised their faces from the sparkling whirlpool of the sea in admiration of the sight. The men saw by one and no other light these mermaids in the nude, stand nipple-naked in the grey-green swell. Then Peleus, inflamed, is carried away in love with Thetis, then Thetis does not scorn human marriage, then Jupiter understands that Peleus must be joined to Thetis.

O heroes, born in a time much desired by the generations, and kin of the gods, you hail! I'll address you often in my song. **Peleus**, are you the leader of Thessaly, so especially honoured with prosperous wedding torches, to whom Jupiter himself, himself the father of the gods, gave his mistress? Did **Thetis**, the lovely Nereid, embrace you? Did Tethys and Oceanus, who in the sea embrace the whole world, grant you their granddaughter to marry?

Then on that very same longed-for day, all of Thessaly thronged to come together to the house, and the palace was filled with rejoicing crowds: they bore gifts before themselves and made their delights known by their countenance. They left Cieros; they left Phthiotic Tempe, the houses of Crannon and walls of Larisa; they came together at Pharsalus and filled Pharsalian houses. As nobody stayed in the countryside, the necks of young bulls became soft, the low grapevines hadn't been cleared out with curved hoes, no bull was tugging at the earth with a sloping ploughshare, no foliage tenders' knives cut down the shadow of a tree, but rust was accumulating filth on the lonely ploughs.

Yet Peleus' home, wherever the opulent palace extended, was shining with gleaming gold and silver. Ivory was shining on the thrones, drinking cups were shining on the table, and the whole house, glittering, rejoiced in the royal treasure. In the middle of the house there had been placed, indeed for a godly bride, a marriage couch gleaming with Indian ivory and covered in purple with pictures of ancient folk, showing with delicate handiwork the rugged virtue of the heroes.

On the cloth, gazing out from the shore of Naxos, which resounds with the noise of the sea, and watching **Theseus'** departure in his rapid fleet is **Ariadne**. She has been bearing untamed passions in her breast, but even now she doesn't yet believe she sees the things she views; this is no wonder, since she, then for the first time roused from deceptive sleep, perceives herself unhappily abandoned on a lonely beach. But the heedless young man beats the waters of the sea as he slips off, leaving the empty promises of a windy gale behind. Ariadne with sad eyes looks at him from afar, from the rocky seaweed, like a statue of a Maenad. Alas! She looks at him from afar in turmoil over torrents of cares, and she fails to hold fast the fine textured headdress around her blonde hair; her sheer cloak exposes a breast it no longer veils ...

(After this, Catullus tells the story of Theseus and Ariadne, using scenes which are depicted on the cloth. These are described at some length before the poem returns to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis.)