Married Hero/Single Princess: Homer's Nausicaa and the Indic Citrāṅgadā*

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This paper compares the Homeric episode of Odysseus' meeting with Nausicaa with the encounter between the *Mahābhārata's* Arjuna, and the Princess Citrāṅgadā. Though the Indic tale is far briefer than the Homeric encounter, it shares a remarkable number of its elements with the Homeric *Phaiakis*. Such aggregations of similar motifs may point to common genetic inheritance, and the evidence in this case suggests that these two tales may share a common Indo-European ancestor.

Heroes do many things, not all of them pleasant. But one perk of the job is that it seems to be a sure-fire way to meet women. During their obligatory wanderings in forests or on the high seas, heroes are repeatedly brought into contact with female strangers. This is a commonplace on the level of the genre, only loosely connected to individual cultures and traditions, and holds equally well across a broad swathe of ancient literature, from the abundant princesses of fairy and folktale, to *Gilgamesh's* Siduri, the women of the *Argonautica*, *Odyssey* and *Mahābhārata*, and the biblical woman at wells,[1] to name only a sampling. There are a multitude of reasons, dependent on time and place and tradition, for the proliferation of this scene-type across so many boundaries; one of the most important must be that such encounters simply make for good storytelling; the appeal of "boy meets girl" is inexhaustible.

Given that such scenes are so common, it is risky to make the claim that any two examples from different traditions are genetically related. Nevertheless, this paper attempts to do so, examining two Indo-European epic[2] meetings between heroes and marriageable princesses: Odysseus' encounter with Nausicaa in the *Odyssey* (*Od.*), and the *Mahābhārata's* meeting between the hero Arjuna and the princess Citrāṅgadā, daughter of the king of Maṇalūra (*Mbh.* 1.207.12–23).

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[1] E.g. Moses and Zippora (Exodus 2:16-22), Isaac's servant and Rebekah (Genesis 24), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:9-12), Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42).

This is not the first time either scene has been subjected to the scrutiny of an Indo-Europeanist. Jamison 1997 discusses Nausicaa's tale in terms of Indo-European marriage rituals with productive results, providing ample evidence for the applicability of comparison with Sanskrit epic. A compelling study of the Indo-European roots of both tales may also be found in Allen 1996, a high-level comparison of the *Arjunavanavāsa* with Odysseus' journey that reveals marked structural commonalities by analyzing the progression of the two epic segments. Both heroes become briefly involved with a series of women which Allen has grouped into corresponding pairs: Penelope/Draupadī, Circe/Ulūpī, Sirens/Vargā, Calypso/Citrāṅgadā, and Nausicaa/Subhadrā. The parallel structure thus disinterred bears all the hallmarks of an Indo-European relic. Though there is no space here to recap Allen's arguments, and the particulars of his analysis are not directly in agreement with my own work as presented in the current study, I do not see that either case is necessarily damaging to the other. Allen's arguments lead inexorably to a second round of questions: if, for example, Citrāṅgadā is the reflex of a character who also evolved into Calypso, one of them has deviated profoundly from the original tale. Whence the interloper, whichever she may be? The most likely answer is that she was plucked from elsewhere in the epics, either entirely or in part. In traditional oral literature, although the narratives are endlessly evolving, it seems that a bard hesitates to create even so much as a single new verse when an old one might be pressed into service. We see numerous examples in both epics of near-identical brief scenarios reused in comparable contexts within each tradition,[3] and it must be concluded that the poets did not hesitate to plunder their own stores. If the surrounding narrative at a certain point in the tale has ceased to accommodate the familial back-story or the chastity of a princess, she may fare better if her tale is reworked and part of her original character exchanged with that of an available demi-goddess. Thus clusters of themes become unfixed within the epic, and reassigned or combined with other storylines. This paper traces such a cluster of themes.

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[2] I use the term "Indo-European epic" throughout as a matter of habit and convenience, but "Graeco-Aryan" would be more appropriate. For an excellent and succinct discussion of the different Indo-European periods and linguistic groupings along with their chronological parameters, see M. L. West 2007:5-25.

Before detailing the reasons offered in support of my case, it is necessary to note the vast presentational differences between the stories. Odysseus' stay with the Phaiacians is a pivotal episode whose importance extends far beyond the meeting with Nausicaa and is the setting in which he narrates for the first time all of his adventures leading up to his stay on Calypso's island.[4] The *Mahābhārata*'s narrative of Arjuna's liaison with Citrāṅgadā is in no respect as fully developed, and in fact occupies only 11 verses. But virtually every element in those 22 lines finds a ready analogue in the Homeric *Phaiakis*. I return to the issue of the size discrepancy later, as it plays a role in my analysis.

Although the two episodes under consideration differ dramatically in certain ways, an examination of the basic segments of the Citrāṅgadā tale suggests that they have been composed using a number of the same basic building blocks as the story of Odysseus and Nausicaa. Such aggregations of similar motifs can persist in oral tales long after the stories themselves have undergone substantial evolution, and often point to a common genetic inheritance. These shared elements are briefly detailed below, ordered as they appear in the Indic version.

1. The Traveling Hero, Separated from His Wife. This first item is intended only to point out that these scenes belong to the journeying (rather than battle) portions of their epic cycles, and involve the heroes' separation from their wives. Both Odysseus and Arjuna are on extended journeys and separated from their wives against their will. Odysseus is, of course, returning home from Troy. Arjuna is undergoing a temporary period of exile from his brothers and their joint wife, mandated by his intrusion into the private time of his wife and older brother during a dharmic emergency (related in *Mbh.* 1.205). The structure of Arjuna's period of exile resembles that of the *Odyssey* in a number of ways: its most noteworthy feature is the hero's separation from his wife, it comprises a series of encounters with women, and it emphasizes piety and appeasement of the gods. A preoccupation with water and the sea, which occurs only in the *Arjunavanavāsa,* adds a final surprising commonality. Though the sea figures little in the *Mahābhārata* as a whole (the forest is the usual *locus* of activity outside civilization), it is prominent during Arjuna's solo travels.

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[3] There are countless examples of such pairs. I give two here for illustration: *Od.* 4.360-370 and 12.325-328 (trapped on an island / the winds won't blow / the men fish for food / the hero wanders off alone / divine intervention) and *Mbh.* 1.142 and 3.12 (a rākṣasa attacks / Bhīma fights him / spins him violently to subdue him / one of them roars like a kettledrum / the rākṣasa is killed like a sacrificial animal).

[4] Relevant commentaries on the *Phaiakis* include Woodhouse 1930:54-65, Vallillee 1955, Rose 1969, Gross 1976, Olson 1991.

2. The Meeting at the River-Mouth. Both encounters begin at a river-mouth, specifically one adapted for human use. Odysseus arrives on Scheria at a river-mouth used as a washing place, after swimming along the coast searching for a place to come to land (*Od.* 5.438–443). The meeting place and its exceptional laundering capabilities are described as Nausicaa and her attendants arrive there to use its permanent washing basins (*Od.* 6.85–87).

In the *Mahābhārata,* Arjuna leaves behind his retinue (*Mbh.* 1.207.10–11) and resolves to travel along the seacoast, eventually arriving at Maṇalūra, where he visits its sacred river-bathing sites and sanctuaries (*sarvāṇi tīrthāni puṇyānyāyatanāni ca*) at *Mbh.* 1.207.13–14. His arrival and presumptive bathing are thus structurally similar, though more dignified than Odysseus' wretched landing and furtive bath. Although the Sanskrit passage does not stress it, it is taken for granted in Indian epic that such sacred bathing-pools are the acme of cleanliness and purification, corresponding, on a more spiritual plane, to Nausicaa's well-engineered washing place.

3. The Visit to the Town. Though the seacoast and the river are stressed as the general location of the *Mahābhārata* episode, *Mbh.* 1.207.14 tells us that Arjuna also visits the town to pay his respects to the king of Maṇalūra, just as Odysseus' final destination is the city of the Phaiacians. Although both stories begin at the riverside, both are ultimately concerned with civilization, politics and social rank.

4. Walking About the City. The actual meeting of Arjuna and the princess takes place in the next *śloka*, when Arjuna sees Citrāṅgadā "walking about in the city" (*pure tasminvicarantīṃ*, *Mbh.* 1.207.15). While the meeting does not take place in the city, the question of whether they should walk through it together on their way to the palace is handled in detail at 6.255–289, when Nausicaa vividly imagines the scandal that might result from their being seen together in public. *Od.* 7.72 adds that Arete, Nausicaa's mother, enjoys great popularity among her subjects "when she walks about in the city" (*hote steikhēs' ana astu).* Though this might appear to be a minor element, its use in reference to all three women assumes some importance. The *mores* described in the epics are a composite of centuries of cultural practices and poetic invention, and we have no indication that either society practiced extreme purdah-style isolation of women. Nevertheless, to describe women of the royal family as walking freely about the city likely indicates a special situation. This is in accord with the exceptional position these women hold in their respective families (discussed below). When viewed as determining details in three portraits of women endowed with high social standing, these seemingly offhand mentions can be seen as critical pieces of characterization, striking and unusual to their ancient hearers and therefore excellent candidates for retention in the narrative.

5. A Recounting of the Royal Succession. A narration of minor historical difficulties over the kingly succession plays a role in both stories. *Od.* 7.56–57 and 62–68 detail the Phaiacian royal family's genealogy from the patriarch Nausithous. After the untimely death of his son Rhexenor, his other son Alcinous assumes the kingship and marries Arete, Rhexenor's only child.

Mbh. 1.207.17–20 explains a similar problem with the royal succession. An ancestor petitioned the god Śiva to ensure the survival of the royal family, and was given the guarantee that there would always be at least one child in the royal line.

Unfortunately for Citravāhana, no male heir has been produced, and he must rely on his daughter to produce the dynast.

6. Unique Status. Arete's high status is much touted within the text: she is "honored as no other woman upon the earth is honored" (*Od.* 7.67), and is even called upon to resolve disputes between men (*Od.* 7.74). Though the source of her high rank[5] is never spelled out, she "wields far more power than is normal for a Homeric queen" (Olson 1991: 1) and judging by placement of the declarations of her power within the text, this appears to be connected to the crisis in the royal succession described above.[6] The work of Finkelberg (2005: 65-89) makes a powerful argument that the kingship in Mycenean and Dark Age Greece seems to have been passed on through marriage to the daughter of the king. Selection of the groom was accomplished through *svayaṃvara*, and the resulting system reconciles the need for continuity of leadership and smooth transfer of power with certainty that the best man is getting the job. This would explain the coupling of the history behind Arete's marriage with the assertion of her political importance. It also raises the possibility that Odysseus is not merely being offered a wife but, obliquely, a chance at the throne of Scheria.

Citrāṅgadā, too, enjoys a special designation on account of the succession issues in her family. As her father explains to Arjuna, because of the boon given to his ancestors, his daughter will surely have a child, and he has taken this into account legally. At *Mbh.*1.207.21 he explains that he has designated her as his "*putrikā*,"[7] and that her son will be the inheritor of the kingdom. Thus, while the absolute outcome of a possible post-marriage succession in both stories may vary (in

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[5] See also Whittaker 1999 for a discussion of Arete's unusually high status.

[6] These two features of Citrāṅgadā's story (the problem with the succession, and her exceptionally high status) are attached in the Greek tale more closely to Arete than to Nausicaa, but this need not be an impediment to viewing them as shared inherited traits; the same principles regarding the re-use or reassignment of traits discussed above apply here as well.

[7] Olivelle (2005: 196-197) translates *putrikā* as "female-son," and the law regarding the *putrikā* is handled in detail in the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* at 9.127–140. The term is most concisely defined as "daughters whose sons are considered the immediate sons of the daughters' father." van Buitenen 1978:448, n. to 1.60.10.

Scheria the bridegroom himself may be in line for the throne; in Maṇalūra, his son will be the heir), in both cases the marriage has strong political, as well as romantic, overtones.

This is the small-scale equivalent to the larger epic re-organization discussed earlier; storytelling is an essentially conservative art, and audiences are not pleased to see remembered details dropped. Reassignment of a characteristic or a detail that has become awkward for the narrator is a common alternative to the more radical step of complete removal, because it preserves the familiar character of a story while allowing room for greater artistic freedom.

7. A Shared Epithet. At *Mbh.* 1.207.18, the formulation *Umāpatiḥ* "Husband-of-Umā" used in the ancestor's petition to Śiva for progeny, recalls Odysseus' words to Nausicaa at *Odyssey* 8.465, which refer to Zeus as the *posis Hērēs*, "husband of Hera." The epithets are linguistically connected by the word for "husband": Greek *posis* and Sanskrit *patiḥ* are both reflexes of IE **potis* ("lord, husband"), though there is no direct connection between the goddesses Umā and Hera other than their status as the spouses of ruling gods, and the Sanskrit employs a *ṣaṣṭhī tatpuruṣa* compound where the Greek simply uses the genitive. There are, however, interesting similarities in the usage patterns of the phrases. Both epithets are relatively uncommon, with only seven Homeric occurrences and 35 in the *Mbh.*; and excepting seven instances in the Sanskrit epic, all occurrences are line-final. The Greek version is a strongly fixed formula, preceded in every case by *erigdoupos*, while the *Mahābhārata* varies its accompaniments, favoring three of Śiva's other epithets *bahurūpa* (4 times), *viśvarūpa* (3 times), and *virūpākṣa* (3 times).

Epithet use is often context-based, and this tendency is observable in both cases. While the four Iliadic appearances of *posis Hērēs* appear random in their subject matter (*Il.* 7.411 and *Il.* 10.329 are used at oath-takings; at *Il.* 13.154 Hector asserts that Zeus is aiding him; at 16.88 Achilles tells Patroclus not to get carried away with success), the other Odyssean examples occur together in a female-oriented context, a passage that highlights Helen's role and mentions Telemachus' marriage prospects: at *Od.* 15.111 as Helen prepares to present Telemachus with a robe for his future wife, and at *Od.*15.180, the beginning of Telemachus' farewell to Helen.

In the *Mahābhārata*, the vast majority of occurrences of *Umāpatiḥ* are contained in exhaustive epithet-lists in praise-passages directed at the god.[8] But when not used within an epithet string, the epithet appears in episodes specifically concerned with women and feminine issues, including a supplication for progeny by a king and his two wives at *Mbh.* 3.104.11, twice in Ambā's prayer to Śiva that she be reborn as a man at *Mbh.* 5.188.7, 9, and twice in an episode concerning the domestic life of Śiva and Umā at *Mbh.* 12.330.71, 62. Thus, if the two scenes under discussion here are related, the preservation of the same epithet in each can be regarded as a conscious association with the subject matter, strengthening the case that they spring from the same source.

8. A Hasty Offer of Marriage. Alcinous suggests with surprising haste that Odysseus might marry his daughter.[9] He has known Odysseus for a scant 150 lines when he suggests how happy he would be if the stranger would wed Nausicaa and settle in Scheria, even offering a house and possessions as added incentive (*Od.* 7.311–315). A number of critics have argued that Nausicaa is an element from folktale, and that the original version contained a marriage between the princess and the hero. Woodhouse (1930: 54–65) points out that the games-scene among the Phaiacians follows the pattern of a *svayaṃvara*, while Vallillee (1955: 179) feels that as it stands, the marriage-less episode is a “tragic artistic blunder”. Some ancient versions apparently found a way to tie things up nicely: according to Eustathius, “They say Telemachus married Nausicaa, the daughter of Alcinous” (*Tēlemakhon phasi Nausikaan gēmai tēn Alkinoou*, Eust. in *Od.* p.1796, 35. Bernabé 1996: 104). Some commentators have defended the lack of a wedding: Taylor (1963) feels strongly that Nausicaa's role in the epic is to show that Odysseus will not give up his *nostos* and marry her, while Gross (1976: 317) sees the impulse toward marriage, but insists the episode is coherent as it stands and showcases Odysseus' political savvy through his “discreet resolution of a difficult problem.”

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[8] These include: *Mahābhārata* 2.10.20; 3.41.19; 3.81.149; 3.83.24; 3.256.25; 5.49.24; 8.24.40; 10.6.33; 10.12.26; 10.70.3; 13.17.40; 13.145.33; 14.8.1,6,27; 14.8.29

[9] Aristarchus, in fact, was surprised and puzzled, and wondered if these lines were genuine. Heubeck, et al., 1998: 339

A marriage does, of course, occur in the Indic episode. Citravāhana is eager for a marriage between Arjuna and his daughter in order to produce a son for the royal succession, and he immediately makes an offer in response to Arjuna's tactful inquiry (*Mbh.* 1.207.22). Though Arjuna fathers a son upon Citrāṅgadā, he does not remain in Maṇalūra, but continues upon his journey. Odysseus, on the other hand, sidesteps Alcinous' offer entirely and requests passage home to Ithaca.

Conclusions

Setting aside entirely, for the moment, the idea that these two stories are reflexes springing from the same Indo-European proto-epic tale, the most interesting facets of this comparison are the two respects in which the episodes differ: the disparity in their sizes and the fact that one contains a marriage while the other does not. It seems quite likely that these two features are a direct result of one another.

As described in Allen 1996, both scenes come from portions of their epic in which the hero moves from woman to woman: Odysseus parted company with Circe only to end up in the embraces of Calypso, was rescued by Ino/Leukothea, and now Nausicaa (and her father) would like him to become her husband. Arjuna has just made his common-law marriage to Ulūpī the *Pannagī* (*Mbh.* 1.206–208), and after his marriage to Citrāṅgadā, he tangles briefly with Vargā, an Apsaras-turned-crocodile, and he finally decided to marry Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā through a legal abduction at *Mbh.* 1.211–13. And of course both heroes have wives waiting for them at home as well. In these floods of romantic adventures, individual incidents can easily get lost. The brief detail of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā's marriage gives every impression of being retained only to avoid a lengthy explanation in Book 14 when the son they produce re-appears for a dharma-mandated single combat with his father, with subsequent joyous reconciliation.

Heroes marry princesses all the time in folktales; they do so elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* in scenes even more brief and understated than the one under discussion here. By comparison, the Homeric *Phaiakis* is a poignant and memorable tale of youthful hopes dashed and a traveler's fidelity in the face of temptation. If these scenes do share the bones of a common ancestor, there can be no certainty about its length or import in relation to the modern versions, but the similarities are beyond mere coincidence. The commentators cited above who felt that a marriage was noticeably absent from the *Phaiakis* are probably correct, but that absence may be the source of the episode's unusual power.

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