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Women breaking rank: gender inversion in post-Homeric warrior assemblies

The warrior assemblies of Homeric epic are not events in which one expects to find female participants. Hellenistic and Imperial epic authors, however, present us with groups of women who transgress this gender norm: the Lemnian women in Apollonius' *Argonautica* and the Trojan women in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* engage in debates which imitate and manipulate the structure of Homeric warrior assemblies. This paper discusses the contrasting ways in which Apollonius and Quintus exploit gender inversion in this Homeric set-piece. In the *Argonautica*, contrasts between the women's assembly and its Homeric archetypes are used to create an atmosphere of political dysfunction: previous scholarship has not fully discussed the speakers' gender in conjunction with the unusual structure of this debate. In the *Posthomerica*, by contrast, the women's debate is powerful in ways that have been overlooked by previous work in this field: it challenges the gendered restrictions and objectification of women in the *Iliad* by reframing and remobilising several Iliadic debates.

Apollonius presents the female community on Lemnos as dysfunctional in both battle and politics. Their preparations for battle are marred by fear and despair; subsequently, their assembly (discussing potential responses to the Argonauts' arrival) allows pragmatism to triumph over principles in a marked departure from typical Homeric warrior assemblies. Furthermore, the presence of the nurse Polyxo and recurring sexual undertones use gendered stereotypes to distort this scene's resemblance to its Homeric archetypes. In Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*, the Trojan women watch the battle from the walls and discuss charging into battle themselves. This debate reframes several assembly-scenes and debate scenes in the *Iliad* (most notably, the famous scene at the Scaean Gate in *Iliad* 6). Frequently, the women's arguments recall moments in the *Iliad* when women are objectified; in response, their debate challenges the gendered restrictions which Homeric warfare entails.