

Then you will coast Thrinakia, the island
where Helios's cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks
of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven,
with fifty beasts in each.

710 No lambs are dropped,
or calves, and these fat cattle never die. . . .

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts
intent upon your course for home,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.

715 But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew. . . .”


*The Ithacans set off. Odysseus does not tell his men of Circe's last
prophecy—that he will be the only survivor of their long journey.
Still speaking to Alcinous's court, Odysseus continues his tale.*

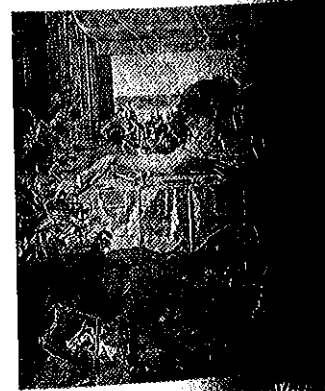
“The crew being now silent before me, I
addressed them, sore at heart:

720 ‘Dear friends,
more than one man, or two, should know those things
Circe foresaw for us and shared with me,
so let me tell her forecast: then we die
with our eyes open, if we are going to die,
or know what death we baffle if we can. Sirens
weaving a haunting song over the sea
725 we are to shun, she said, and their green shore
all sweet with clover; yet she urged that I
alone should listen to their song. Therefore
you are to tie me up, tight as a splint,
erect along the mast, lashed to the mast,
730 and if I shout and beg to be untied,
take more turns of the rope to muffle me.’

I rather dwelt on this part of the forecast,
while our good ship made time, bound outward down
the wind for the strange island of Sirens.
735 Then all at once the wind fell, and a calm
came over all the sea, as though some power
lulled the swell.

The crew were on their feet
briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,
each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades
740 and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved
a massive cake of beeswax into bits

 659–716. According to Circe, what dangers lie ahead for Odysseus and his crew? List the dangers in order from least severe to most severe, and give your reasons for placing the threats in this order.



Circe Pouring Poison into the Wine of the Arrival of Ulysses (1891) by Sir Edward Burne-Jones

and rolled them in my hands until they softened—
no long task, for a burning heat came down
from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward
I carried wax along the line, and laid it
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb^o
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
and took themselves again to rowing. Soon,
as we came smartly within hailing distance,
the two Sirens, noting our fast ship
off their point, made ready, and they sang. . . .

The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water
made me crave to listen, and I tried to say
'Untie me!' to the crew, jerking my brows;
but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes^o
got to his feet, he and Eurylochus,
and passed more line about, to hold me still.
So all rowed on, until the Sirens
dropped under the sea rim, and their singing
dwindled away.

My faithful company

rested on their oars now, peeling off
the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;
then set me free.

But scarcely had that island

faded in blue air when I saw smoke
and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—
a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.
Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking
wild alongside till the ship lost way,
with no oar blades to drive her through the water.

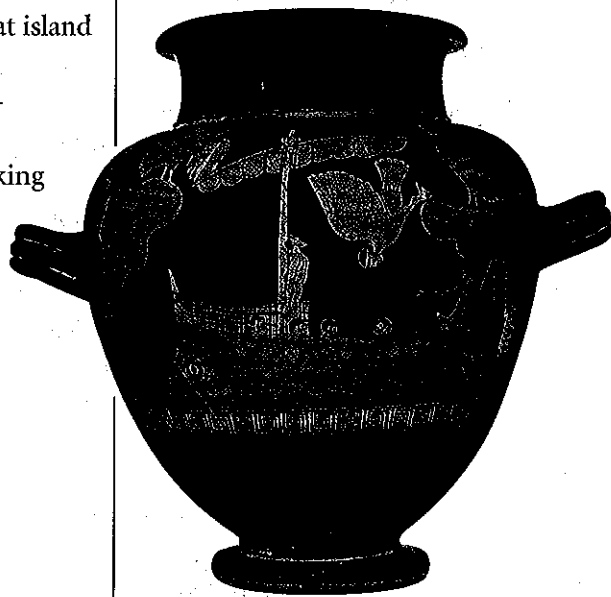
Vocabulary

ardor (är'dər) *n.*: passion; enthusiasm.

tumult (tūm'ult) *n.*: commotion; uproar; confusion.

746. **plumb** (plum) *adv.*: vertically.

755. **Perimedes** (per-i-mē'dēz').



Odysseus and the Sirens, Athenian
red-figure stamnos vase by the
Siren Painter, late Archaic, c. 490
B.C. (earthenware).

British Museum, London, UK.