

## CHAPTER THREE

### APOLLONIUS OF RHODES

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Regarding space in the *Argonautica*, Delage stated in 1930: 'l'épopée d'Apollonios est surtout géographique.' Few have repeated the statement with similar emphasis, but the geographical component of the *Argonautica* undeniably catches the eye:<sup>1</sup> throughout, the Argo's route is charted with great precision, often in the style of a scientific work of geography.<sup>2</sup> In fact, one of the epic's feats is the combination and harmonisation of the various routes of the Argo found in previous mythographers and contemporary scientific sources.<sup>3</sup> It seems that especially the extensive Libyan episode in book 4 should be considered both a tribute to poetical tradition (Pindar, *Pythian* 4) and a way of mythically justifying Greek presence in Northern Africa; an ideological issue of interest for the Ptolemies.<sup>4</sup> There are a number of extensive synoptic descriptions in the epic, describing natural phenomena, landscapes, buildings and objects. It is noteworthy however, that a relatively large number of these is focalized by the narrator and, more strikingly, seems to have no direct bearing on the actual action of the narrative. This explains some of the epic's unusual feel.

Besides such apparently unmotivated descriptions, there is another noteworthy aspect of Apollonius' treatment of space that deserves attention: the thematic importance of man's interaction with his surroundings. The Argo's passage causes numerous changes in the landscape (often described in aetiological digressions, things that are 'still there to

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<sup>1</sup> D. Meyer 2001: 233; Clare 2002: 67. Harder 1994:19 disagrees.

<sup>2</sup> Important studies are Elliger 1975; Fusillo 1985; Williams 1991; Harder 1994: 17–35; D. Meyer 2001: 217–235; Danek 2009: 275–292. Manakidou 1992 focuses on ekphrasis. On the development of ancient geography, see van Paassen 1957; Jacob 1991; Lanzilotta 1988. I have not seen Thalmann 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Delage 1930: *passim*. Ptolemaic interest may account for the geographical focus; cf. D. Meyer 2001: 219, 222, 234.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Clauss 2000: 11–32; Stephens 2000: 195–215; Stephens 2003: 171–238; Mori 2008: 9.

be seen'). Also, Orpheus and Medea exercise magical power over nature and Heracles uses his superhuman physical strength to the same end. Finally, there appears to be a kind of mutual influence between material aspects of the landscape and the psychology of the heroes: often, the landscape subtly mirrors their state of mind ('paysage moralisé', 'Erlebte Raum').

### *Distribution of Space*

In book 1.559, the Argo departs. Before this event, the space of the narrative has been summarily indicated in the proem with references to the Black Sea and the Cyanean Rocks (or Symplegades) (1.2–3), the characteristic landmarks of the Argo's journey in early myth; in the geographical backgrounds of the individual Argonauts in the Catalogue (1.18–223); in the brief indications of the setting of Iolcus and the launching place Pagasae (1.234–367); and in the description of the outfitting and launching of the ship Argo (1.368–401), a kind of narrativized setting of the place where much of the action will take place.<sup>5</sup>

After this, in the first two books the distribution of spells of travelling and going ashore follows a fairly regular pattern: travelling is generally narrated in swift passages enumerating landmarks passed and seen by the Argonauts; disembarkations are introduced by descriptions of varying length, depending on the narrative importance of the setting. Thus Lemnos is merely called 'rocky Lemnos, the Sintian island' (1.608) before the narrator details what happened there the year before the Argo arrived (the slaughter of its male inhabitants), while the geographical layout of Cyzicus is described in some detail (1.936–1052) because of its role in the mistaken killing of the Doliones. An important exception to this is the passage 2.899–1029, where extensive descriptions of an ethnographical and geographical nature are included of places and peoples merely passed by (discussed below).

With the exception of its prologue on Mt Olympus (3.6–167), book 3 is set in Colchis, and due to the splitting of the storylines (Medea, Argonauts, Aetes) is situated in different locations simultaneously; especially the palace of Aetes is described quite extensively (3.215–248). Book 4 comprises the tortuous and eventful journey back. As so many

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fusillo 1985: 289.

extraordinary places are visited or passed (the Celtic Lakes, the island of the Sirens, Trinacria, the Syrtis, the Libyan deserts), this book contains most of the epic's extended descriptions. The end of the journey (4.1765–1766, 1776–1777), on the other hand, is very briefly and laconically summarized. As this overview shows, the distribution of spatial descriptions is somewhat uneven, sometimes occurring at places where there is no narrative action; and with a strong concentration in book 4.

### *Fabula-Space versus Story-Space*

Modern editions of the *Argonautica* usually contain a map of the Argo's route, which demonstrates that this route can be easily followed when reading the poem: although partly based on Odysseus' wanderings (especially in book 4), the description of the Argonauts' progress is embedded in realistic geography as known in the third century BC, especially on the outward journey (books 1–2).<sup>6</sup> The *fabula-space*, theoretically comprising all the locations on the roundtrip Iolcus-Colchis and back, is generally presented in a manner that is typical of *periplous*-accounts: the narrator mentions the major landmarks (e.g. mountains) along the coast seen by the Argonauts, which enable them (and the narratees) to ascertain their position.<sup>7</sup> Danek (2009: 282) comments on the strict linearity of the outward voyage:

In books 1 and 2 ... Apollonius represents space as a single line which allows no departures or alternatives. We get the impression that the narrator's view is strictly limited to a camera's eye installed on the top of the mast of the Argo.

This is broadly true, and is confirmed by the fact that more than once the Argo's journey is likened to a 'path' (e.g. 1.545–546, 573–579). The landscape is often focalized by the Argonauts rather than the narrator, as in the following account of a speedy passage along a stretch of coast:

... from there [Aphetae] they sped onward past Meliboea, *seeing* its coast and stormy beach. At daybreak they immediately *saw* Homole situated by the sea and skirted it. Soon thereafter they were to pass by the streams of the river Amyrus. From there they *beheld* Eurymenae and the sea-washed

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Delage 1930: 278; D. Meyer 2001: 218–220; Clare 2002: 66–67.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Güngerich 1950 on this practice in *periplous*-literature. Cf. e.g. 1.922–935, 1164–1166, 1360–1362. Note that Phineus' prophecy too focuses on similar landmarks (esp. 2.347–372).

ravines of Ossa and Olympus. But running all night with the blowing wind, they passed the cliffs of Pallene beyond the headland of Canastra. At dawn, as they fared on, the Thracian mountain of Athos *rose before them*, which with its highest peak casts a shadow over Lemnos even as far as Myrine, although the island lies as far away as a well-equipped merchant ship could travel from dawn to midday.<sup>8</sup> (1.592–605)

Interrupting the focalizations of his characters, the narrator, like a historiographer with an interest in natural marvels, suddenly relates the information about the amazingly long shadow cast by Mt Athos (in omnitemporal present tense; focalizations by the Argonauts are in past tense). There is no direct relevance of this interruption for the narrative, although theoretically the shadow could have been observed by the Argonauts too, especially since they passed Mt Athos at dawn. The same does not apply to the details provided *in extenso* by the narrator regarding the Thermodon Delta (2.970–984, described as if seen on a map and from above), the Amazons (2.985–1000, whom the Argonauts do *not* encounter) and the Acherusian Headland (2.729–745, described in such detail as would be impossible for a passing seafarer to take in). Both the *periplous*-format and the naratorial digressions are strongly reminiscent of (→) Herodotus and geographical literature and this confirms that Apollonius' narrative technique is at some points more like that of a historian than that of an epic poet.<sup>9</sup>

Although this is not always easy to prove, the scholia suggest that the amount of detail provided in such geographical descriptions depended on the exactness of the sources at Apollonius' disposal. It has been suggested that the descriptions of Cyzicus, the region of Heraclea Pontica, and Corcyra owe their precision to the fact that Apollonius drew his information from chronicles of local historians.<sup>10</sup> The passages on the Eridanus (Po), the Tritonian Lake and the land of the Bebrycians on the other hand, are much vaguer. That the eastern region of the Pontos is described mainly in terms of *ethnography* rather than geography (the customs of the Amazons, Chalybes, Tibareni and Mossynoeci) is usually also attributed to the nature of the information at Apollonius' disposal,<sup>11</sup> although, more generally speaking, the interest in ethnography is also

<sup>8</sup> All translations are taken from Race 2008. See on this passage Harder 1994: 17.

<sup>9</sup> See SAGN 1: 62.

<sup>10</sup> See in particular Baschmakoff 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Delage 1930: 291, 292, 281; D. Meyer 2001: 220.

a characteristic fitting in with the Herodotean slant of the narrator.<sup>12</sup> In any case, it is attractive to assume that the mode of description may to some extent reveal the nature of the sources Apollonius used to plot the Argo's voyage.

Another feature corroborating this is the actual layout of the route. The first leg of the journey, from Iolcus to Colchis (books 1–3), is fairly straightforward. Apollonius follows traditions which presented the natural course towards Colchis, via the Bosphorus and through the Euxine Sea, following the southern shore. This was a well-known trade route. The Argo's return, on the other hand, is odd. Various traditional routes through this region were known, passing either through a river network in Northwestern Europe (Timaeus, Timagetus), or through the Adriatic and the Ligurian sea surrounding Italy (Homer, Timaeus), or via Northern Africa (Hesiod, Pindar, Herodotus and Antimachus). Alternatively, the Argo could have returned the same way it came (Callimachus).

However, instead of limiting himself to one of these traditional routes, Apollonius combines them or alludes to them, with the unlikely result of taking the Argo from the Euxine Pontos (Black Sea) northwest through the river Ister (Danube) into the Adriatic Sea, thence back into the Eridanus (Po), through interconnecting rivers into the Ligurian sea, and finally, via Libya back to Greece. This 'petit tour de force', as Delage calls it, results in an intriguing combination of the latest scientific and scholarly insights with all that poetic and mythical geography had to offer. It is probably useless to ask what Apollonius actually believed to be true; the point is rather that he included what he knew had been told, following the Argo's progress 'on an imaginary map on which earlier poets and historians have left their marks: signposts that cannot be ignored by a Hellenistic writer'.<sup>13</sup> In the process, special attention was awarded to politically important space and tradition, as in the Libyan episode.

A peculiar mixture of myth and pseudo-empiric observations is also visible in the description of the Acherusian Headland:

[The Acherusian Headland] *rises* in steep cliffs facing the Bithynian Sea. At its base, rocks washed smooth by the sea *are* rooted in place and around them the waves roll with a mighty roar, but above, the spreading plane trees *grow* on the highest peak. Down from it towards the interior *slopes* a hollow valley, where the cave of Hades lies, covered over with woods

<sup>12</sup> The presentation of these peoples by Phineus in 2.372–397 is in fact noticeably similar to the ethnographical descriptions in Herodotus.

<sup>13</sup> D. Meyer 2001: 227.

and rocks, from which an ice-cold vapour, blowing up continuously from its chill depths, ever *forms* a glistening frost which *melts* in the midday sun. ... Here too is the mouth of the Acheron river which *gushes* through the headland and *issues* into the eastern sea, for a hollow ravine *carries* it down from above. In later generations, Nisaeen Megarians named it the Soönautes river, when they were on their way to settle in the land of the Mariandynians, for it saved them along with their ships when they encountered a violent storm. (2.729–745)

This description is wholly focalized by the narrator and provides a kind of panoramic overview in the omnitemporal present tense. Sometimes the narrator's viewpoint shifts, while he zooms in on remarkable details (reminiscent of paradoxography), suggesting the empiric, realistic character of the information (the cold vapour forming frost that melts at midday). It has been suggested that this style aimed at enhancing the realism of the narrative and enabling the narratees to relate to the ancient, mythical events told in it (cf. Barthes' *effet de réel*).<sup>14</sup>

Another way of relating mythical events to the present of the narratees is the attention the narrator pays to many traces (some of them still visible) left in the Argo's wake. These aetiological digressions are, of course, focalized by the narrator and therefore related in an omnitemporal present tense. In form and purpose aetiologies are a kind of conflation of the 'reference to the narrator's own time'<sup>15</sup> and the 'reference to the narrator's own space' motifs. The focus on aetiology is also typical of Callimachus (hence *Aetia*), and is generally believed to result from the scholarly preoccupations of the Alexandrians, stimulated by the wish of the Ptolemies to relate the present to Greek mythical tradition. The traces left by the Argo form a theoretically visible link between the primeval, heroic world and that of the well-read (or travelled) third-century narratees, with the effect that the heroic past becomes tangible as well as relevant, and the truth of the Argonautica journey is 'proven'.

The reader of the *Argonautica* may in fact get a nagging suspicion that the expedition of the Argonauts is thus at some level a Greek civilizing exercise which changes the face of the earth permanently, mostly for the better.<sup>16</sup> Young, pious and polite heroes work in concord

<sup>14</sup> Zanker 1987: 71–72. Conversely, Beye 1982: 103 argues that such passages make the mythical facts related in the epic narrative seem 'naive' in comparison.

<sup>15</sup> See index of *SAGN* 1 and 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Clauss 2000: 11–32; although he also notes the general pessimistic atmosphere of the epic which seems to imply, at the same time, that the world may have become 'more human but less humane'.

to dispatch brutes in untanned hides (Amycus), to silence, slay or chase monsters (the Sirens, Gegeneis, harpies), to populate (is)lands (their fertile encounter with the Lemnian women; the clod of Libyan earth), to open up seaways that were unnavigable or unknown before (the Symplegades, the fanciful return via Danube, Rhone and Swiss lakes), to oppose a cruel tyrant king (Aeetes) and abduct his willing daughter (Medea).

More negative enduring changes in the landscape result, e.g., from the accidental killing of the Doliones, in the form of a spring formed by the nymphs' tears cried over Cleite, the murdered king's wife (1.1065–1069). Significantly ambivalent is the way in which Heracles' killing of the monstrous snake of the Hesperides and the creation of a fountain is related by these nymphs to the Argonauts as a cruel and destructive deed, although it saves the Argonauts (4.1432–1449).

Most of the changes in the landscape take the form of human constructions (altars, shrines, graves and cities), but there are also some changes in nature itself, and of course changes in place-names, although these do not qualify as 'space', even if they signify Greek influence on space.<sup>17</sup> An example is the description of the beach of Elba (Aethalia), where the Argonauts scrape off their sweat with local pebbles (4.656–658):

... and these, skin-like in colour, are strewn along the beach. And there too are the throwing stones and wondrous equipment of theirs, where the place is named the harbour of Argo, after them.

We see how a physical characteristic of the location in need of explanation, and in fact locally or traditionally explained in this way (the skin-colour pebbles and, apparently, boulders or rocks in the form of discs and other sports equipment), is related to a name, 'Argo's harbour', which together with this narrative 'proves' the aetiology. This makes an un-Greek, often unclaimed, landscape by a physical token 'Greek': *the Argo was here*. Collecting and combining historical, ethnographical and literary sources that refer to events related to the Argo's journey, Apollonius turns this event into a pivotal point in Greek history.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Human constructions: 1.1058–1062: grave of Cyzicus; 1.1345: city founded by Polyphemus; 2.841–844: grave of Idmon; 2.851–857: grave of Typhis; 4.1620–1622: temples for Triton and Poseidon. Changes in nature: 1.1145–1149: spring created by Rhea; 2.604–606: Symplegades become fixed; 4.1444: spring created by Heracles; 4.1755: clod of earth becomes Thera.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. SAGN 2: 80.

Ideologically by far the most important aetiology would appear to be the creation of the island Thera, strategically placed as the last one before Argo returns home.<sup>19</sup> Thera was the place from which Greeks would eventually migrate to Cyrene, a city-state under Ptolemaic influence at the time of the *Argonautica's* composition. The Argonaut Euphemus receives a clod of Libyan earth as a guest gift from the marine divinity Triton as the Argo leaves Libya after making sacrifices to Apollo (4.1552–1563). Later (4.1731–1764), after an epiphany of Apollo, Euphemus dreams he both nurses and ravishes the clod in the form of a woman; but in his dream the woman explains that if he throws her into the sea, she will turn into an island, Calliste, that will feed his descendants. From there, as the narratees would have known, the Dorian Greeks would migrate to Cyrene (cf. Pindar *P.* 4). Thus a divine mandate could be seen to justify the Greek presence in Northern Africa.

Conversely, some landmarks and peoples encountered were already present before the Argonauts' arrival and are therefore identified not only through description, but also by an account of their past, explaining their present appearance or name. In fact, the Argonauts frequently follow in the footsteps of other heroes, and thus become part of a network of monuments and legends (cf. 2.658: the temple of Dipsacus; 2.911–914: the tomb of Sthenelus; 2.385–387, 1169–1173: a temple built by the Amazons; 4.114–120: a temple built by Phrixus). Their most recent predecessor is of course Heracles, after his disappearance in 1.1198.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that in the composition of the epic the route of the Argo is actually determined by various (sometimes contradictory) ancient traditions found by Apollonius in his research, whereas in the narrative it is the single journey of the Argonauts which influences the history and physical aspect of places they pass on their way, creates an interesting paradox. A particularly revealing example of this may be found in 4.552–556, where the narrator, before embarking on the most Odyssean stretch of the Argo's journey, around Italy's west coast, asks the Muses how it is possible that traces of the Argo are to be seen 'beyond the Adriatic sea and Italy'. This is certainly not where the Argonauts were heading at this point of the narrative; they must have had to make a very strange and unexpected detour to arrive there. This gives the impression that though traces and lore in this region were traditionally part of the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stephens 2000: 203–204.

<sup>20</sup> Williams 1991: 89.

Argonautic material,<sup>21</sup> the narrator wonders (or wishes to make his narratees wonder) how he is going to fit them into his version of the *story*. How can the narrator still make the Argo sail along the west coast of Italy, having already taken it where it is now? The detour is subsequently explained as resulting from the anger of Zeus after Apsyrtus' killing, which causes a storm that blows the Argonauts off course. On a metapoetic level, explicitly marked by this invocation of the Muses, the passage draws attention to the stitching together of different poetic traditions.

Considering this, I suggest interpreting the description of the bard Orpheus (which opens the Catalogue of Argonauts in book 1) on a metapoetic level as a trope for the compositional technique of Apollonius:<sup>22</sup>

And [Orpheus], *they say*, charmed the hard boulders on the mountains and the course of rivers with the sound of his songs. And the wild oak trees, *signs still to this day of his singing, flourish* on the Thracian shore of Zone where they *stand* in dense, orderly rows, (*hexeiēs stikhoōsin*) the ones he led forth from Pieria, charmed by his lyre. (1.26–31)

The phrasing *hexeiēs stikhoōsin* here seems to allude to hexameter verse, and it may be recalled that the Greek technical, rhetorical term for poetic material was *hulē*, which seems, in turn, to be hinted at by the oak-trees, which are arranged in orderly rows by Orpheus' songs. Also, these trees are led down by lyric music from the homeland of the Muses, Pieria. Orpheus may therefore function as a symbol for the poet Apollonius and his ordering of traditional stories into a unified narrative about the Argonauts, 'proof' of which is then provided by the (still visible) traces left in the Argo's wake. Similarly, Orpheus leaves his marks on the landscape by his songs, and his description also addresses the important theme of altering/ordering the landscape with lasting results: the trees he charmed with his song remain *to this day* (note once more the omnitemporal present tense) as testimony to his singing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For *fabula* (the aggregate of events reported in a narrative in their full form and chronological order) and *material* (the extratextual historical sources or traditional tales from which a narrator forms his *fabula*), see *SAGN* 1: 9.

<sup>22</sup> Klooster 2011: 76–77.

<sup>23</sup> For Orpheus as an ordering force, cf. Clare 2002: 231–260. Orpheus' ordering influence on his surroundings is visible at 1.569–574; 2.161–163; twice Orpheus' song is indirectly linked to the creation or finding of a spring: 1.1145–1149; 4.1423–1430. The cosmogony (1.503–511) describes the 'ordering' of the universe.

Besides Heracles, who changes landscapes by brute force (1.1188–1205; 4.1441–1449), the other main character whose powers change nature is Medea. Her chthonic magic, contrary to the charming powers of Orpheus, creates chaos: ‘she can suddenly halt the flow of roaring rivers and arrest the stars and the paths of the sacred moon’ (3.532–533).<sup>24</sup> When her witchcraft comes into play, in book 3 (the episode in Colchis) and the first part of book 4 (the chaotic flight of the Argonauts’ and their sacrilegious murder of Apsyrtus), Orpheus’ ordering influence is remarkably absent from the narrative. If this singer who provides order and harmony is at some level indeed to be equated with the Apollonian narrator, it becomes attractive to relate this absence to what Morrison (2007a: 271–312) has called the ‘crisis of confidence’ which the narrator undergoes in the later books of the *Argonautica*.

*Space of the Narrator versus Story-Space  
(Orientation versus Disorientation)*

Though the ostensible aim of the Argo’s quest is to capture the Golden Fleece (1.4), Jason’s main object, from the moment of departure onwards, is always a safe return home.<sup>25</sup> He departs ‘at the command of King Pelias’ (1.3), who wishes to get rid of him, since it has been prophesied that Jason will kill him. For that reason Pelias ‘arranges the ordeal of a very arduous voyage, so that either on sea or else among foreign people [Jason] would *lose any chance of returning home*’ (1.15–17; cf. the fate of Odysseus’ companions: *Od.* 1.9). The *length* of the journey is in fact emphasised from the very beginning: ‘their journeys on the vast sea’ (1.21). Particularly telling is the announcement in the catalogue of heroes of Mopsus’ death in Libya, ‘as far from the Colchians as the distance that is seen between the setting and the rising of the sun’ (1.79–85). Mopsus dies not only far from home, but also far from Colchis, which emphasises the vast extent of the Argo’s journey. More and more, in particular on the journey homeward (book 4), the space travelled by the Argonauts is thematically presented as a vast, hostile and undesirable element which does not excite their interest.

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<sup>24</sup> At 4.54–66 the Moon, as a personified goddess, remarks on the irony that Medea, who once bewitched her, is now herself bewitched by Eros.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fusillo and Paduano 1986: 7–8. In particular: 1.415–416; 2.411; 3.992–996; 4.202–205.

Indeed, Apollonius himself presumably did not travel far and wide, even if his narrating persona offers the narratees detailed information about locations the Argonauts pass, and the route they struggle to find.<sup>26</sup> A similar contrast between a (sometimes prophetic) authority aware of the details of the route, even though he has not travelled it, and the disorientation of the actual travellers thematically recurs within the narrative. Phineus, the blind prophet, accurately foretells the Argonauts how to travel from Thynia onwards to Colchis (2.317–407).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Argus, the son of Phrixus, provides information about the return route by reproducing geographic knowledge found on an ancient engraved map (4.279–293).<sup>28</sup>

The one time the Argonauts themselves are able to enjoy a panoramic view of the route ahead is after their second ascent of Mt Dindymum (1.1112–1116): ‘Before their eyes appeared the Macrian heights and the entire coast of Thrace opposite, as if they held them in their hands (...)’.<sup>29</sup> In fact, their spatial standpoint here is reminiscent of that of the gods, as exemplified by Eros’ descent from Olympus to Earth (3.164–166): ‘And beneath him at times appeared life-sustaining earth and cities of men and divine streams of rivers, and then at other times mountain peaks, while all around was the sea (...)’. Though this technique is not new in itself (→ Homer), the fact that the narrator, as it were, flies along with Eros is innovative (shifting standpoint).<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, this divine perspective (here Athena descending to earth) is likened in a complex simile to that of a traveller who sees all routes homeward unfolding before his mind’s eye:

And as when a man roams far from his homeland—as we suffering humans often must wander—and no land is distant but all routes are visible, and he thinks of his own home and pictures at once the way by sea and by land, and in his swift thoughts seeks now one place, now another with his eyes—so quickly did Zeus’ daughter spring down and plant her feet on the inhospitable Thynian shore. (2.541–548)

<sup>26</sup> Delage 1930: 293: ‘un voyage en chambre plutôt qu’ un journal de bord’.

<sup>27</sup> Phineus uses a narrative style strikingly similar to that of the narrator. Fränkel 1968: 179 characterized the prophecy as a ‘geographischer Lehrfilm’ and a ‘gesprochene Landkarte’.

<sup>28</sup> Other guides (often demi-gods): Cyzicus (1.982–984), Argus (2.1197–1215), the Argo itself (4.580–591), Thetis (4.851–865), the Libyan Heroines (4.1305–1379), Hesperides (4.1406–1448), Triton (4.1551–1585).

<sup>29</sup> See on this passage Williams 1991: 85–89 and Clare 2002: 66–73.

<sup>30</sup> See Danek 2009: 287.

Besides addressing the theme of the wanderer's desire for home, this simile beautifully captures the gap between human and divine powers: what humans may only imagine, gods (and omniscient narrators) can actually do.

*The Characterizing and Psychologizing Functions of Space*

In the *Argonautica* there is a distinction between the spatial representation of normal, run-of-the-mill locations and that of marvellous places. Generally speaking, indications of 'normal' surroundings are brief and not very colourful. Towns and cities are just mentioned, as are palaces (with the exception of that of Aetes). The narratees are presumably expected to fill in the details from their own experience:

They observed a projecting stretch of land which from the gulf looked very broad and at sunrise they rowed ashore. Here were located the ox stables and sheepfold of Amycus, haughty king of the Bebrycians ...<sup>31</sup>  
(1.1360–2.1–2)

Besides creating such unspecific descriptions that leave practically everything to the narratees' imagination, Apollonius sometimes uses similes to suggest, by means of contrast or association, elements of locations. For instance, Medea and the lamenting maidens ready to die in the Libyan desert are compared to swans on the grassy banks of the river Pactolus: the lush, watery landscape in the simile by contrast suggests the aridity of their actual surroundings (4.1296–1305).<sup>32</sup>

When we do find extensive descriptions, these concern unusual localities or objects, foremost Cyzicus, the Symplegades, the Thermodon Delta, the Acherusian Headland (discussed above), the palace of Aetes, and the shallows of the Syrtis. Here it should be noted that the descriptions often are longer than the function of the setting in the story warrants. Among the objects, it is in particular the mantle of Jason and the ball of Eros that command the attention. Interestingly, these descriptions all follow entirely different formats, both in their achievement of impressions of visual (or even acoustic) directness and in their presentation (focalized by narrator or characters, dynamic integration into the narrative or pause, panoramic, scenic, or close-up standpoint).

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Harder 1994: 16–17. Other examples, e.g.: 1.608, 782–790, 965; 2.759–760; 3.210–212; 4.1068.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 1.545–456, 573–579.

The Argonauts' greatest adventure on their way to Colchis is doubtless their passage through the Symplegades. Its description is dynamically integrated into the narrative according to the focalization by the Argonauts in the various phases of their approach and struggle to enter and pass the straits (shifting standpoint). The acoustic element plays a remarkable role; in fact, as Phineus had predicted, the terrifying sound of the rocks is the first sign of their proximity:<sup>33</sup>

... they proceeded very fearfully, for already the *thudding of the crashing rocks struck their ears*, and the sea-washed headlands *resounded*.

(2.552–554)

Following Phineus' advice, the Argonauts send a pigeon to precede them through the Symplegades, and this is when the frightening spectacle of the Symplegades is first described fully:

The two rocks came back together again with a crash. A mass of seething spray shot up like a cloud and the sea roared terrifyingly, and the vast sky rumbled all around. The hollow caverns at the base of the jagged rocks boomed as the sea surged within, while the white foam of the crashing wave spurted high above the cliff.

(2.564–570)

The impression one takes away from this description (the passage continues for another 35 lines) is that of action, noise and visual directness. Adjectives and adverbs suggest the psychological effect on the Argonauts (fearful, terrifying). There is no narratorial focalization or use of the present tense, both because in this way the focalization by the Argonauts underlines the fearful aspect of the Symplegades and because they were no longer visible as moving rocks in the narrator's own time.

Narratorial comment (panoramic overview in omnitemporal present tense) is mixed with focalization by the heroes (scenic standpoint with past tenses) in one of the most appreciated descriptions of the *Argonautica*, the Syrtis-episode. The situation here could not be more different: whereas the dynamic Symplegades at least offered the Argonauts the opportunity to actively overcome their danger, the eerily silent, lifeless Syrtis-landscape leaves them utterly helpless. This passage follows the format of the description by negation (→ Homer):

... they came far into the Syrtis, where there is no getting back out again for ships, once they are forced to enter that gulf. For everywhere are shallows, everywhere thickets of seaweeds from the depths, and over them silently washes the foam of the water. Sand stretches along the horizon, an no land

<sup>33</sup> Similar emphasis on acoustic phenomena at e.g. 4.129–138.

animal or bird travels there. Here it was that a flood tide—for frequently indeed does this tide recede from the mainland and then, rushing back again, violently disgorge itself on the beach—suddenly drove them to the innermost part of the shore, and very little of their keel was left in the water. They leapt off the ship and sorrow gripped them when they looked at the sky and the expanse of vast land stretching just like the sky into the distance without a break. No watering place, no trail, no herdsmen's steading did they see in the distance, but everything was wrapped in dead calm ... (4.1235–1250)

In the chaotic movement of the Symplegades, elements (sea, air, rocks) were hard to distinguish from each other, but the Syrtis' scary stillness also blurs the elements: sea, land and sky are all vast, undifferentiated expanses. The emptiness causes complete disorientation, a feeling that there is 'nowhere to go'.<sup>34</sup> What nature there is, is in fact inverted: there is too much water, and it is too shallow; plants grow there rather than on land, there is no animal life.

This episode is the only time the Argonauts themselves remark upon the landscape, and they too compare it to their passage through the Symplegades. First an anonymous Argonaut, evoking and preferring the ordeal of this previous adventure, comments on the desolation of the present landscape (4.1251–1268). Then the narrator's observations about the impossibility for ships to escape from the Syrtis are echoed almost literally and enlarged upon by Ancaeus, the helmsman (4.1261–1276). Finally, to emphasize once more the utter unnaturalness of a landscape where nothing is as it should be, the heroes are likened to lifeless ghosts in a plague- or war-stricken city where frightful omens invert the natural order (4.1280–1289). The fact that neither narrator nor characters see a way out underlines the miraculous nature of the eventual escape, the carrying of their vessel through the desert for twelve days in a row, in its turn an inversion of the normal way of travelling.

The desolation of the landscape beautifully mirrors the despair that takes hold of the Argonauts in this episode. Such mutual reflection of psychology and nature in the manner almost of pathetic fallacy recurs several times in the epic.<sup>35</sup> An example occurs when the Argonauts

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<sup>34</sup> Complementing this landlocked disorientation is the episode at sea near Crete, where distinctions between air and sea are similarly blurred in complete darkness (4.1694–1701). On the Syrtis-episode, see Williams 1991: 163–184; Harder 1994: 18; Clare 2002:150–159.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the description of Medea's sleepless despair (3.744–765). Here it is rather the quiet landscape that contrasts with the turmoil in Medea's breast.

enter the Eridanus after their treacherous murder of Apsyrtus. They pass through an incredibly gloomy and disturbing landscape of pine trees (the transfigured Heliades) which are weeping amber tears along the marshy banks of sulphurous smoking waters, mourning their brother Phaethon's fall from his father's sun chariot (4.596–620). Since we have been told that Apsyrtus' alternative name was *Phaethon* (3.245), the suggested relation between the landscape and the heroes' anguished guilt becomes even stronger. Note also the poignant contrast between the sisterly tears of the Heliades, and Medea's unrepentant murder of her brother Apsyrtus/Phaethon.

No desire for food or drink came over the heroes, nor did their minds turn to joyous thoughts. But instead, during the day they were sickened to exhaustion, oppressed by the nauseous stench, which, unbearable, the tributaries of the Eridanus exhaled from smoldering Phaethon, while at night they heard the piercing lament of the loudly wailing Heliades, and as they wept, their tears were borne along the waters like drops of oil.

(4.619–626)

We see here once again that the landscape is invoked through focalization by the heroes; their physical and psychological reactions to it indirectly depict its distinctive aspects (a nauseous stench, wailing sounds).

By a variety of techniques then, all the above passages involve the narratees in the heroes' plight, either through focalization by the heroes themselves (Symplegades, Eridanus), or through mixing objective facts stated by the narrator with the heroes' despair (Syrtris), or by creating landscapes that reflect the heroes' psychology (Syrtris, Eridanus). In these respects these passages differ completely from the description of the Thermodon Delta (2.970–984):

No river is like that one, nor does any send forth from itself over the land so many separate streams. If anyone were to count each one, he would be four short of one hundred. But only one true source exists, and this flows down to the plain from high mountains, which, they say, are called the Amazonian mountains. From there it spreads straight into higher ground, and that is why its courses are meandering: one constantly winds this way, another that way, wherever each most readily finds low-lying land—one far away, another close by. Many of the branches have no names where they are drained off, but the river, joined by a few streams, empties in full view into the Inhospitable Sea, beneath the curved headland.

Clearly, this description does not represent the way the Argonauts could have seen the delta; it seems to be focalized from above, suggesting a panoramic view, or even a depiction on a map studied by the narrator

(note once more the omnitemporal present).<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the passage develops into an ‘if not’-situation, stating that the Argonauts would certainly have encountered and become involved in a fight with the nearby Amazons (who are described in a relatively lengthy ethnographical digression), had not a favourable wind begun to blow (2.985–1000). It is typical for the narrative style of the *Argonautica* that the passage not only creates a pause in the narrative, but does so by recounting facts that seem entirely irrelevant to it. It could, however, be suggested that the description of the network of streams is meant to foreshadow the importance of rivers for the Argonauts’ return home. This would fit the interpretation usually given to the digression on the Amazons. These *female warriors* are considered to foreshadow the paradox that the Golden Fleece is finally obtained through Medea’s love rather than by the valour of the heroes.<sup>37</sup>

Besides the description of the Amazons, there are more signs that, once the Symplegades are passed, the Argo enters a kind of topsyturvy land where customs are unpleasantly un-Greek. Ethnographical asides on the habits of the Tibareni, Mossynoeci and Chalybes constantly emphasize the contrast with ‘normal’ practice (always in the historiographer’s omnitemporal present). Similarly, the narrator’s focalized description of one of the first items in view in Colchis, the plain of Circe, is bizarre and unpleasant: ‘many tamarisks and willows grow in rows, on whose topmost branches hang dead bodies bound with cords’ (3.200–203).<sup>38</sup> This inversion of ‘normal’ Greek practice should perhaps be linked to the fact that the Colchians are in fact portrayed as descendants of the Egyptians (cf. 4.259–293), who were traditionally (i.e. since Herodotus at least) generally seen as ‘most opposite to the Greeks in every respect’ (Hdt. 2.35.1).

The palace of Aeetes is one of the main locations of the narrative of book 3. Until this point the action has been mainly outdoors, or on board of the Argo, or on couches of leaves under the starry sky, with the important exception of the Lemnian episode, where the Argonauts enter the Lemnian women’s city and, of course, their beds. Book 3, however,

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Fränkel 1968: 258–259, who draws a diagram of the delta. The one mention of maps in the *Argonautica* occurs at 4.272–281; these maps portray river networks, too.

<sup>37</sup> The theme of women, love and war is foreshadowed in the descriptions of Atalanta, Aphrodite reflected in Ares’ shield on Jason’s mantle, the encounter with the Lemnian women.

<sup>38</sup> The entering of the Symplegades has been read as a symbolic *rite de passage*, or *katabasis*. Cf. 2.728–745, 1248–1250, 1271–1275.

is mainly taken up with the intimate emotions of Medea. On a symbolic level this is echoed by the fact that she is often depicted indoors, in her room in the palace.<sup>39</sup> The fact that many scenes take place behind closed doors in the women's quarters also enhances the atmosphere of secret treachery and duplicity characterizing the Colchian episode, which is on a narrative level underscored by the fact that here the story becomes separated into multiple, simultaneous storylines.<sup>40</sup>

When Jason finally enters Aeetes' palace, it is described in great detail (3.215–248), deriving much from the description of (→) Homeric dwellings, in particular Calypso's cave and Alcinous' palace in the *Odyssey*.<sup>41</sup> The Homeric allusions hint at the contrasts and similarities between its most important inhabitants: cruel Aeetes is the very opposite of righteous Alcinous, while Medea is similar to Nausicaa (a young girl longing for a stranger's attention) and Calypso (loved and eventually left by the hero). The description once more mixes focalization by the characters with what appear to be remarks by the narrator, although these are not in the typical omnitemporal present of his ethnographical and geographical digressions, presumably because this is so clearly a place of myth. The order of the description reflects the order in which the Argonauts enter the palace (vestibule, courtyard, threshold, garden, etc). But the narratee wonders how the visitors could have known about Hephaestus' artefacts, or the magical springs, or Apsyrtus' mother. Theoretically, Argus, the son of Phrixus, a Colchian who guides Jason and his men, might have furnished this information,<sup>42</sup> but this seems to be gainsaid by the narratorial comment 'it is said'. Most likely, we are dealing with an 'Alexandrian footnote' of a learned narrator: there was a source mentioning these facts. In this sense, the passage is different from its Homeric model, where the narrator is simply omniscient and no reference is made to possible sources.

A noteworthy feature of the description of the palace is the way in which it furnishes a line-up of the Colchian characters that will play important roles in the sequel:

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<sup>39</sup> See Manakidou 1992: 169–173 on how the palace symbolizes Medea's maidenhood. Note the recurrence of doors, bolts and thresholds (3.645–649, 822; 4.26–42).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Danek 2009: 283–287.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. e.g. Williams 1991: 151–162. Homeric elements: Calypso's garden and cave (*Od.* 5.55–75) also have a vine and four fountains. Alcinous' palace (*Od.* 7.81–132) sports similar architectural elements as Aeetes' palace; it is also ornamented with two bronze dogs made by Hephaestus.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Danek 2009: 283–284.

And here a central door was forged, and next to it were many well-built double doors and rooms in both directions, while an ornate colonnade ran all along both sides. At angles on either side stood taller buildings. In the loftiest one lived King Aeetes with his wife, while in the other lived Aeetes' son Apsyrtus [excursus on Apsyrtus' mother: 3.242–246]. But in the rooms lived the servants and Aeetes' two daughters, Chalciopé and Medea. (3.215–248)

Similarly pointing forward are the miraculous artefacts produced by Hephaestus for Aeetes, which include the magical bronze bulls and the plough which Jason will have to wield to prove his valour and obtain the Golden Fleece (3.230–234). In this way, major themes of the subsequent narrative are economically incorporated into the setting where events take place.

Such layering of meaning is also found in the two most famous descriptions of objects in the *Argonautica*: the mantle of Jason and the ball of Zeus promised to Eros. Both of these ekphrases have received a considerable amount of critical attention. I will here limit myself to the mantle of Jason, a gift from Athena, which he puts on when he is preparing to meet the Lemnian queen Hypsipyle (1.721–768).<sup>43</sup> The scholiast already noted that this passage was an allusion to the Shield of Achilles (→ Homer),<sup>44</sup> and pointed out the symbolic importance of the fact that Jason's weapon of choice is a beautiful cloak rather than a shield. It characterizes him as *apolemos*, a 'love hero' (Lawall 1966), whose *aristeia* depends on, or even consists of, the seduction of women. The mantle is not described while being made but the narrator states that it *was made* by Athena in the past. The description takes the form of a list: 'next in order was *fashioned*' (*etetikto*, vel sim.), 'and on it were/was' (*esan/eēn*). The passage thus forms a pause of 47 lines during which the story remains stationary: it opens with Jason preparing to fasten the clasp and ends with his doing so.

The wonderful colour and ornaments of the mantle plainly reveal its divine origin: 'You could cast your eyes more easily on the rising sun than gaze at that cloak's red colour ...'<sup>45</sup> But this phrase also hints at the

<sup>43</sup> On the significance of the ball (symbolizing the Universe), see in particular Manakidou 1992: 143–156; Pendergraft 1991: 95–102; Clauss 2000: 11–32.

<sup>44</sup> Although the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis* also plays a role in the ekphrasis.

<sup>45</sup> Its red colour and its shining brightness are leitmotifs in the epic, constantly connected to (Jason's) erotic desirability. Significantly, these also occur in the description of the Golden Fleece at 4.167–177, later used as wedding bed for Jason and Medea (4.1141–1152).

difficulties of actually seeing and understanding what is depicted on it, a point to which we will return below. Differing from the Homeric shield-description once more, the images are for the most part episodes from myth, not general images of human life. Moreover, they are described in a way that remains mostly within the boundaries of what might actually be depicted, in other words, they are static images rather than dynamic scenes, although the lifelikeness of the final vignette is stressed:

And on it was Phrixus the Minyan, as if actually listening to the ram, which seemed to be speaking. When looking at them, you would fall silent and be deceived in your heart, expecting to hear some wise pronouncement from them; and so you would gaze for a long time in that expectation.

Inviting the participation of the narratees, this final passage hints at the problems of interpreting the pictorial program on the cloak as a whole: it would seem to evoke the narratees' amazement, their wish to hear 'some wise pronouncement' on its (prophetic) meaning. In effect, the cloak's description has invited a considerable amount of critical attention. Although it is immediately clear that the stories or images depicted are in some way important to major themes of the narrative, the point of discussion is how this relation should be construed. Whereas some wish to read all the images as corresponding strictly to single events in the narrative, or functioning as lessons for Jason, it seems more attractive to read them in an associative, at times clearly paradigmatic, at other times more obliquely symbolic way: they do not all relate in the exact same way to elements of the narrative and often predicate on various themes and events simultaneously.<sup>46</sup> Bulloch (2006: 44–68) suggests moreover that there is a deeper correspondence with the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which obliquely reflects on the sinister turn which Jason's relation with Medea will take.

In the associative interpretation, the Cyclopes' fashioning of their thunderbolts (1.730–734) refers to the important theme of Zeus' justice and might, by which the Argonauts must but do not always abide.<sup>47</sup> The vignette of Amphion and Zetus constructing the walls of Thebes by the power of music and physical strength alternately (1.735–741) exalts the ordering, constructive power of song (as embodied principally in Orpheus) over muscular strength (e.g. Heracles, Idas), or, on a broader

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<sup>46</sup> See bibliography in Fusillo 1985 and Manakidou 1992.

<sup>47</sup> Their most important transgression of Zeus' laws is the murder of Apsyrtus. The Cyclopes-vignette, moreover, takes up the end of Orpheus' song in 1.508–511.

level, of civilization over brutality (Polydeuces and Amycus; Jason and Aetes). In an almost metonymical way, Aphrodite mirroring herself in the shield of Ares (1.742–746) alludes to the dual theme of love and war in the Argonautic quest, which finds its climax in Medea's love for Jason. Erotic desire may function as a 'weapon', but the image also points to the danger that such desire may breed 'war' and ultimate destruction.<sup>48</sup> The final image of Phrixus and the speaking ram (1.763–667) furnishes a close link between ekphrasis and narrative, by depicting the antecedent to the whole venture of the Argonauts and, simultaneously, its goal, the Golden Fleece. Moreover, since the pronouncement of the ram was presumably an oracle, the picture may also be said to reflect self-referentially on the prophetic function of the iconographical programme of the cloak as a whole.

Thus, although the description in fact forms a pause in the narrative, it is also one of the most important passages in the whole epic in terms of thematic explication and the foreshadowing of events. Moreover, the cloak is not just a cloak but the first in a series of cloaks that form a meaningful thread throughout the epic, linked by the themes of love, war, and deceit. In 2.30–32, Polydeuces, preparing to fight the brute Amycus, is said to be wearing a cloak given him by one of the Lemnian women. Addressing the opposition between brute force and elegant civilization, this episode in turn prefigures the contrast between Jason (whom we remember cloaked in his beautiful mantle, a gift from Athena) and Aetes (dressed in bronze armour fashioned by Hephaestus: 3.1225–1234). Preparing a sacrifice to Hecate previous to his test of valour against the Earthborn giants, Jason wears another Lemnian mantle given to him by Hypsipyle 'as a memento of their fervent lovemaking' (3.1203–1206); as was the case with Hypsipyle, it is Jason's erotic appeal that has seduced Medea into giving him the magic drugs he is about to offer to Hecate; like Hypsipyle, Medea will eventually be left by Jason. Finally, Medea's brother Apsyrtus is lured into Jason's trap by the gift of the mantle on which Dionysus and Ariadne once made love (4.423–434), and which was another gift from Hypsipyle.<sup>49</sup> Here not only the Lemnian connection is brought into play, but the story of Theseus deserting Ariadne is evoked as well.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. the invocation to Eros in 4.445. Note that Aphrodite is 'a poetic description of a reflected image in a woven picture' (Zanker 1987: 69).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *SAGN* 2: 70–72.

Besides furnishing an oblique comment on many major themes of the epic by way of its ornaments, the mantle of Jason is the first in a meaningful series and a privileged symbol of love and treachery throughout the epic. The fact that this mantle is made of a woven fabric, full of 'intricate designs (*daidala polla*), skilfully fashioned', meta-poetically predicates on the finely wrought strand the mantles themselves form in the texture of the narrative.

### *Conclusion*

The treatment of space in the *Argonautica* is a multifaceted subject. Whereas Apollonius has paid considerable attention to the harmonisation of geographical and literary traditions surrounding the Argo's voyage, the amount of attention he pays to the description of settings which are important to the narrative varies greatly. He describes in detail locations that seem to have no specific relevance, whereas locations where significant action does take place are merely sketched in by means of a few lines. These frequent digressions, focalized by the narrator, point to the interesting paradox that, although Apollonius presumably has not travelled the route of the Argo, he is aware of its remarkable details, which do not seem to interest his disoriented, home-sick heroes at all. This contrast recurs in the opposition between authorities aware of the route ahead, and the ignorance of the Argonauts themselves.

A key theme is changes in the natural surroundings of the Argonauts, in particular as a result of actions by the heroes themselves. They frequently interfere with the landscape they encounter, transforming it. These transformations are recounted by the narrator as aetiological stories. Since the traces left by the Argonauts are still visible, they form a link between the mythical past of the narrative and the present of the narratees and narrator, as well as 'proving' the correctness of the narrative. The strong emphasis on the Libyan episode clearly holds ideological implications for the presence of the Greeks in Northern Africa.

On a more psychological level, the landscape also appears to influence the Argonauts and, in particular, their state of mind. This is specifically the case in the Syrtis-episode and the passage through Eridanus. I have suggested that both themes, altering and ordering the landscape, and ordering sources to re-create the Argo's route, are metaphorically addressed in the description of Orpheus, who changes and orders nature with his songs.

While some learned digressions *prima facie* interrupt the narrative flow, it is almost always possible, on a deeper, thematic level, to explain them as relevant. This is the case with the enigmatic excursus on the Thermodon-delta and the Amazons, the asides in the description of Aetes' palace and, most significantly, in the series of mantles, beginning with the mantle of Jason, which are described at various thematically central moments in the narrative.

On the whole, by mixing awareness of literary predecessors with quasi-scientific geographic interests and incorporating multilayered descriptions into his narrative, Apollonius has created a richly variegated, complex space for his characters to move in (and his narratees to read about).