



Kernos

Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion
grecque antique

20 | 2007
Varia

Ritual mutilation in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*

A contextual analysis of IV, 477-479 in search of the motive of the
μασχαλισμός

Reinhart Ceulemans



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/kernos/173>

DOI: 10.4000/kernos.173

ISSN: 2034-7871

Publisher

Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2007

ISSN: 0776-3824

Electronic reference

Reinhart Ceulemans, « Ritual mutilation in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* », *Kernos* [Online],
20 | 2007, Online since 24 May 2011, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/kernos/173> ; DOI : 10.4000/kernos.173

Ritual mutilation in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*. A contextual analysis of IV, 477-479 in search of the motive of the *μασχαλισμός**

Abstract: In Apoll. Rh., *Arg.* IV, 477-479 Jason mutilates the corpse of Apsyrtus. To date, there has been a great deal of scholarly disagreement concerning the motive of this *μασχαλισμός*: either the mutilation was intended as a cathartic appeasement sacrifice, or its goal was to avert the vengeance of the victim's ghost. This article opens up a new perspective by examining the ritual within the broader context of the fourth book of the epic. The appeasement motive is generally considered to have originated with Apollonius. However, a contextual study shows that he meant to apply the vengeance motive. All the signs that indicate an appeasement sacrifice can be explained in other ways. Moreover, Apollonius more than once explicitly refers to the defilement of Medea and Jason. The conclusion is that Jason mutilated Apsyrtus in order to avert his vengeance, not to bring an offering of atonement.

Résumé : Dans Apoll. Rh., *Arg.* IV, 477-479, Jason mutile le corps d'Apsyrtos. Jusqu'à présent, le motif de ce *μασχαλισμός* a fait débat : ou bien la mutilation est vue comme une offrande expiatoire et cathartique, ou bien l'on considère que son objectif était d'éviter la vengeance de l'esprit de la victime. Cet article ouvre une nouvelle perspective en examinant le rite dans le contexte plus large de l'épopée d'Apollonios, qui semble être le point de départ du motif expiatoire. Néanmoins, une lecture contextuelle montre qu'il a plutôt tendu à appliquer le motif de la vengeance. Tous les signes indiquant un sacrifice expiatoire peuvent être expliqués d'une autre façon. En outre, Apollonios se réfère plusieurs fois explicitement à la souillure de Jason et Médée. Dès lors, il s'avère que Jason a mutilé Apsyrtos pour éviter sa vengeance et non pour offrir un sacrifice expiatoire.

In the fourth book of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, a striking passage has been the cause of great debate. After his description of how Jason snuck up behind the unsuspecting Apsyrtus and killed him, the Rhodian writes these gruesome verses:

ἦρωσ δ' Αἰσονίδης ἐξάρματα τάμνε θανόντος,
τρὶς δ' ἀπέλειξε φόνου, τρὶς δ' ἐξ ἄγος ἔπτυσ' ὀδόντων,
ἦ θέμις ἀθέντησι δολοκτασίας ἰλάεσθαι.

* My thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Peter Van Deun (Leuven) and Dr. Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge (Liège), who both commented on previous drafts of this article.

the hero, son of Aison, cut off the dead man's extremities; three times he licked the blood, and three times he spat the pollution out from his teeth, as is the proper way for slayers to expiate treacherous murders (IV, 477-479)¹.

In verse 477, a specific form of mutilation is described, viz. the *μασχάλισμός*, the precise meaning of which is difficult to grasp². Apollonius' adaptation of the ritual occupies a central role in this debate³, but until now this passage has not been examined in the broader context of (the fourth book of) the *Argonautica*. This article conducts this inquiry, as such an examination is the best way to clarify the matter, especially the difficult questions concerning reason and motive.

1. Apollonius and Aristophanes: opposite views

Apollonius compresses the actions of cutting off the extremities and licking and spitting out the blood (pollution) into less than three verses. The only explanation he offers is in verse 479: it seems to be an act of expiation. To the modern reader the action seems very cruel and barbarous, but this was certainly also an obscure rite for Apollonius. In the Hellenistic era there was already

¹ English translations of the *Argonautica* are always quoted from that of R.L. HUNTER (1993). Quotations of the Greek text are taken from the edition in three volumes by F. VIAN (1974-1981). For every other translation there is a reference to the source; where there is none, it concerns a personal translation.

² Contributions concerning the *μασχάλισμός* are often old and/or concise. Among them, the most elaborate are: G.L. KITTREDGE, "Arm-pitting among the Greeks," *AJPh* 6 (1885), p. 151-169; A. GOTSCHICH, "Der Maschalismus und seine Wiedergabe in der griechischen Kunst," in H. NOTTARP *et al.* (eds.), *Monumentum Bambergense. Festgabe für Benedikt Kraft*, Munich, 1955 (*Bamberger Abhandlungen und Forschungen*, 3), p. 349-366; M. TEUFEL, *Brauch und Ritus bei Apollonios Rhodios*, Diss. Doct., Tübingen, 1939, p. 102-110; E. ROHDE, *Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (Transl. W.B. Hillis), London/New York, 1925 [Heidelberg, 1920], p. 582-586. Other useful literature includes: S.I. JOHNSTON, *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley *et al.*, 1999, p. 156-159; E. VERMEULE, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, Berkeley *et al.*, 1979 (*Sather Classical Lectures*, 46), p. 236 n. 30; M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, Munich, 1967³ [1940] (*Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft*, 5.2), I, p. 99-100; M. MARCOVICH, "Bedeutung der Motive des Volksglaubens für die Textinterpretation," *QUCC* 8 (1969), p. 31-34; R. PARKER, "A Note on φόνος, θυσία and μασχάλισμός," *LCM* 9 (1984), p. 138; H.S. VERSNEL, "A note on the *maschalismos* of Apsyrτος," *Mnemosyne* 26 (1973), p. 62-63. In order to gain a view on the prevailing theories concerning the different aspects of the *μασχάλισμός*, one should consult these works (and their bibliography), *e.g.* that of Kittredge. This article presents itself as exploring the meaning of the ritual in the *Argonautica*, especially in discovering its motive and rationale. For further bibliography and a *status quaestionis* concerning the different theories on the latter point, *cf.* n. 31-35.

³ At this point one should consider Apollonius' extensive interest in magical rituals, as it is aired elsewhere in his epic, *pace* HUNTER, *o.c.* (n. 1), p. xxvi: "The diminution of the full Olympian 'apparatus' is compensated for by an interest in the human confrontation with the strange and the magical." Although Apsyrτος' mutilation is an essential part of the story tradition of the Argonauts, nowhere else this act is placed in the broader scope of a religious rite. It is the merit of Apollonius that he managed to expand this traditional element with a new perspective, viz. that of a magic ritual.

discussion concerning the precise meaning of the ritual. The treatment by Apollonius has played a crucial role in this discussion, but this verse and the surrounding passage are anything but easy to interpret. By his extreme concision the poet evokes a mysterious and grim atmosphere, which leaves the reader with a “clouded, imperfect knowledge of motive, purpose, and even fact”⁴.

The scholion on Apollonius' *Argonautica*⁵ explains that “the killers in former days used to perform certain mutilations on the murdered corpse, viz. by cutting off its outermost parts; hereafter they hung these parts around the neck [...]. After they subsequently took from his blood, they thrice spat it out. This they usually did with a view to atone for their deceitful murder”. The scholiast confirms that it is an expiation ritual, but does this by deducting a great deal of his text directly from the source text, so this scholion should be read with caution.

A different view is proposed by Aristophanes Byzantinus. He says that “those who have murdered someone by treachery cut off his extreme parts, in order to avert his wrath, strung them together and hung them from their neck, pulling them through the armpits; these parts they called *μασχαλίσματα*”⁶. Whereas Apollonius and his scholiast speak of an appeasement ritual, Aristophanes mentions a motive of averting the revenge of the murdered victim: *ὅπερ τοῦ τὴν μῆνιν ἐκκλίνειν*.

Two different motives are suggested to explain the *μασχαλισμός* ritual, both of which were later elaborated upon by ancient scholiasts and lexicographers⁷.

⁴ C.S. BYRE, “The killing of Apsyrtus in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*,” *Phoenix* 50 (1996), p. 4.

⁵ Schol. Apoll. Rh., *Arg.* IV, 477-479 (ed. WENDEL [1974], p. 286-287).

⁶ *Μασχαλίσματα*: Ἀριστοφάνης, παρὰ Σοφοκλεῖ ἐν Ἡλέκτρᾳ κεῖσθαι τὴν λέξιν ἕθους σημαίνουσαν. Οἱ γὰρ φονεύσαντες ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς τινος (τινα) ὅπερ τοῦ τὴν μῆνιν ἐκκλίνειν ἀκρωτηριάσαντες μόρια τούτου καὶ ὀρθοῦσαντες ἐξευρέμασαν (ὀρθάσαντες ἐξευρήμασαν) τοῦ τραχήλου διὰ τῶν μασχαλῶν διείραντες καὶ μασχαλίσματα προσηγόρευσαν. Σημαίνει δὲ ἡ λέξις καὶ τὰ τοῖς μηροῖς ἐπιτιθέμενα ἀπὸ τῶν ὤμων (ὠμῶν Rohde) κρέα ἐν ταῖς τῶν θεῶν θυσίαις (ed. SLATER [1986], p. 162). The last sentence seems to refer to the practice of the *ὠμοθετεῖν*, rather than to the *μασχαλισμός*. There is one inscription (*SEG* 35, 113), which provides the only attestation of the term *μασχαλίσματα* in its secondary sense. Cf. E. VANDERPOOL, “A *Lex Sacra* of the Attic Deme Phrearrhioi,” *Hesperia* 39 (1970), p. 47-53 (p. 49) and especially E. LUPU, “*Μασχαλίσματα*: A Note on *SEG* XXXV 113,” in D. JORDAN & J. TRAILL (eds.), *Lettered Attica. A Day of Attic Epigraphy. Proceedings of the Athens Symposium, 8 March 2000*, Toronto, 2003 (*Publications of the Canadian Archaeological Institute at Athens*, 3), p. 69-77 and *id.*, *Greek Sacred Law. A Collection of New Documents (NGSL)*, Leiden/Boston (RGWR, 152), 2005, p. 166-168, the latter author offering a thorough analysis of the inscription and reflecting on the mutual aspects of the *ὠμοθετεῖν* and the *μασχαλίσειν*.

⁷ Averting the vengeance: Aristophanes; scholia *Choephoroi* and *Electra*; Pausanias, Hesychius, Photius and *Suda*, *s.v.* *μασχαλίσματα*; *Etymologicum Magnum*, *s.v.* *μασχαλίσειν*. Appeasing the murder: *Argonautica* and scholion; Pausanias, *Suda*, Ps.-Zonaras and *Lexicon Sabbaiticum*, *s.v.* *ἐμασχαλίσθη* and (only *Suda*) *μασχαλισθῆναι*; *Etymologicum Genuinum*, *s.v.* *ἀπάργματα*; Michael Apostolius, *s.v.* *μασχαλισθήση ποτέ*.

One group says that catharsis or atonement is the goal of the mutilation while the other sees it as the corpse being disfigured so that the revenge of its ghost would be averted.

2. Classical ‘praxis’ vs. Byzantine ‘scholarship’: problems in interpretation

In classical literature the verb *μασχαλίζειν* appears twice, viz. in Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*⁸ and in Sophocles’ *Electra*⁹. A scholion to the *Choephoroi*¹⁰ explains that the whole defiling act including the *μασχαλίζειν* was performed by Clytemnestra in order to make sure that Agamemnon would not take revenge upon her (τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος μὴ δυναμένου σοι [...] συμμαχῆσαι πρὸς τὴν τιμωρίαν). The scholion on the *Electra*¹¹ consists of two glosses which seem to give different motives for the mutilation, but in fact amount to the same¹². The α-gloss says that the murderer, by disfiguring the corpse, takes away the power of the dead, and thus avoids the latter’s revenge. The β-gloss speaks of catharsis, but then clarifies that the goal is to make the corpse weak, so that it cannot take revenge (ἵνα ἀσθενῆς γένοιτο πρὸς τὸ ἀντιτίσασθαι τὸν φονέα). According to the scholiasts, in both classical passages the *μασχαλισμός* must be interpreted as a ritual to avoid vengeance.

All three instances of *μασχαλισμός* in Greek literature (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Apollonius) are extremely brief. *Μασχαλισμός*, for example, is an expression that is used only by the lexicographers¹³. Only the related verb *μασχαλίζειν* occurs in the classical authors. Apollonius does not even use either of these words.

The concision of both classical references to the *μασχαλισμός* illustrates that the Athenian public at that time still knew perfectly well what kind of mutilation was intended. Thus, in the 5th century BCE the expression *μασχαλίζειν* and its significance must have been clear¹⁴. To the postclassical and Byzantine scholars however, the authors of the lexica and the scholia, the *μασχαλισμός*

⁸ Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*, 439 (ed. MAZON [1983], p. 96): ἐμασχαλίσθη δὲ γ’, ὡς τόδ’ εἶδῃς.

⁹ Sophocles, *Electra*, 444-446a (ed. DAIN [1958], p. 154): ὕψ’ ἤς θανῶν ἄτιμος ὥστε δυσμενῆς | ἐμασχαλίσθη, κἀπὶ λουτροῖσιν κάρῃ | κηλίδας ἐξέμαξεν.

¹⁰ Schol. Aesch., *Choeph.*, 440-442 (ed. SMITH [1976], p. 26).

¹¹ Schol. Soph., *El.*, 445 (ed. PAPAGEORGIUS [1888], p. 123-124).

¹² On the nature of the glosses, cf. KITTREDGE, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 153.

¹³ Besides its lexicographic occurrences, the term *μασχαλισματα* only occurs in two other instances, viz. Soph., *Troilus*, fr. 623 (ed. RADT IV [1985], p. 455 – a fragment passed down only from the lexicons) and *SEG* 35, 113 (cf. *supra* n. 6).

¹⁴ Cf. GOTSMICH, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 351 and ROHDE, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 582.

was no longer a clear subject¹⁵. Concerning this deep abyss which separates study from practice, Margarete Teufel even feels obliged to note: “falls sie [der *μασχαλισμός*] wirklich geübt wurde und nicht eine Erfindung der Grammatiker ist, herausgesponnen aus dem Worte *μασχαλίζειν*”¹⁶. Exaggerated as this remark may be, it has some truth to it. To the authors of all these glosses and scholia the *μασχαλισμός* is a ritual that is far away from them, a fossil from the ancient past¹⁷. It is exactly because of this reason that an Alexandrine scholar such as Apollonius, a couple of centuries after the classical era, sneaked the ritual into his erudite epic. Many centuries later still, the lexicographers tried to explain it. In the course of this process, older views were passed on, and one scholarly study of the ritual generated another like it. It is no surprise that interpretation errors emerged from this chain of explanations. In this particular case, Apollonius played a decisive role.

The starting point of the scholarly interest is Aristophanes Byzantinus. Academic opinion is divided on the source of his explanation. William Slater, for example, notices that at least a part of Aristophanes' theory could have been an *αὐτοσχεδίασμα*, an improvisation¹⁸. Erwin Rohde¹⁹, however, has great faith in what Aristophanes said on the matter, and resolutely rejects this possibility. According to Rohde, one has to stay close to Aristophanes' outlook, which he has not developed on the basis of his own speculation but through another channel, viz. with “actual knowledge”. If the latter is correct, Aristophanes' explanation can be considered as the basis for the post-Apollonian research²⁰, and he says that the *μασχαλισμός* is carried out in order to avert vengeance. However, this is hardly reconcilable with the fact that Apollonius²¹ seems to state that it was a ritual to atone.

Present-day scholars deal with the same problems as did the lexicographers a few centuries ago, as they still do not exactly know what the *μασχαλισμός* was. A multitude of questions are still awaiting definitive answers, one of the most important ones being that of the precise motive. Why, with what goal, did

¹⁵ Cf. the statement of GOTSCHICH, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 352: “nach dem 5. Jhdt. entschwand die eigentliche Bedeutung des Wortes *μασχαλίζειν* der Kenntnis des Volkes, so daß zum Verständnis Erklärungen nötig waren.”

¹⁶ TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 105.

¹⁷ It is significant that Michael Apostolius for example calls it an *ἔθος* [...] *τοῖς παλαιοῖς*; Pausanias and others (under the lemma *ἔμασχαλίσθη*) talk about *τοῖς ἀρχαίοις*. Nor does the scholion on the *Argonautica* leave any doubt: there it reads *ἀρχαίως* in the beginning.

¹⁸ SLATER, *o.c.* (n. 6), p. 162.

¹⁹ ROHDE, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 583.

²⁰ Cf. A.F. GARVIE, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi, with introduction and commentary*, Oxford, 1987 [1986], p. 163: “[...] Aristophanes of Byzantium, who may be the ultimate source of all the ancient notices”.

²¹ All the lexicons etc. that support the appeasement motive can be traced back to Apollonius. The Rhodian thus is the only original source and starting point of this theory.

Jason perform the *μασχαλισμός*? This article tries to answer this last question and begins by identifying three plausible motives.

3. Goal of the *μασχαλισμός*: three possible motives

The first possible explanation is that by hanging the extremities around the corpse, the killer tries to evoke the impression that the victim himself has done harm to his own person. He then mutilates the deceased in order to deprive him of the possibility of revenge. At the basis of this ritual lies the Greeks' fundamental belief that a dead person arrives in the underworld in exactly the same condition as on the moment of his death²². The primitive idea that the person comes back in his full corporality also seems to play a part. According to this view, when one mutilates the body the deceased will be unable to retaliate. In that way, the mutilation is a security measure against the 'living corpse' that returns to haunt and punish the murderer²³. The mutilation of the body is assumed to effect a corresponding mutilation of the *ψυχή* so that the ghost, deprived of his extremities, would be powerless to take vengeance on the murderer. (For the sake of convenience, from now on this motive will be referred to as the 'vengeance motive'.)

The second explanation is, according to some, under discussion in the passage from the *Argonautica*. The description of the *μασχαλίσματα* as *ἐξάργματα* is of crucial importance. This word, a *hapax* created by Apollonius, seems to denote the same as the terms *ἄργματα* or *ἀπάργματα*, meaning the *ἀπαρχαί*, the firstlings of the sacrificial animal that is offered to the gods. More specifically, this seems to mean that the *μασχαλίσματα* are the firstlings of the murdered victim. This term, in combination with the presence of the verb *ἰλάεσθαι*, has led various scholars²⁴ to (wrongly – *cf. infra*) conclude that the whole act is meant to sacrifice the murdered person as some sort of averting sacrifice or *ἀποτροπίασμα*. Without any doubt, these scholars are inspired by the explanations presented by the scholion on the *Argonautica* and other ancient sources (*cf. supra* n. 7). As they stated, the *μασχαλισμός* would then be a sacrifice intended to avert evil, or a cathartic sacrifice, which practically amounts to the same idea. The prevailing idea is that while one appeases the gods, one passes the defilement onto the victim himself. (This motive is referred to from now on as the 'appeasement motive'.)

A third possible reason for the *μασχαλισμός* is easier to find: the more ordinary desire to humiliate the victim *post mortem* and make him look like a fool²⁵. This motive is not explicitly mentioned in any of the lexicons or scholia,

²² *Cf. e.g.* Hom., *Odyssey* XI, 40-41 and Aesch., *Eumenides*, 103.

²³ *Cf.* TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 108.

²⁴ *E.g.* ROHDE, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 584-585 and KITTREDGE, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 154. *Cf.* also n. 32 and 34.

²⁵ VERMEULE, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 236 n. 30.

but it is reasonable to assume that it was often present in the background. One can assume that in the references of Sophocles and Aeschylus to the death of Agamemnon the motive of humiliation plays along²⁶: the mutilation of the Mycenaean king was exactly the opposite of actual funerary rites. It is very probable that this motive also was latently present in the writing of Apollonius. By mutilating Apsyrtus, Jason deprives him of his *καλὸς θάνατος*²⁷ because “in losing its formal unity, the human body is reduced to the condition of a thing along with its disfigurement”²⁸. Emily Kearns compares the *μασχαλισμός* to the cruel, humiliating treatment of the goatherd Melanthius in the *Odyssey* (XXII, 474-477)²⁹.

It appears that the third motive could be combined with one of the first two, which seem incompatible with each other. Either Jason is motivated by vengeance or by appeasement, but not both. The final objectives of both motives are rather similar, as in both cases it is the intention of the murderer to escape the consequences of the crime. But according to one motive he wants to escape the revenge of his victim, and according to the other the defilement, the blood guilt (*τὸ ἄγος*) which clings to him after the murder. The origin of the vengeance theory is Aristophanes, while Apollonius initiated the appeasement theory.

There is no consensus in modern scholarly research on the question which of these two motives³⁰ is actually intended in this passage (IV, 477-479). A large number of scholars who reflect on the *Argonautica* or on aspects of Greek religion related to those of the *μασχαλισμός* do not mention the strange mutilation at all. Other authors in the same area briefly mention the *μασχαλίζειν*, but do not comment or reflect on the motive that is actually involved³¹. Another group leaves the question open, but carefully suggests either the appeasement motive³² or the vengeance motive³³. Still other scholars do not hesitate to

²⁶ E. KEARNS, *s.v.* “maschalismos,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996), p. 934.

²⁷ JOHNSTON, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 151.

²⁸ J.-P. VERNANT, *Mortals and immortals: collected essays* (ed. F.I. ZEITLIN), Princeton, 1991, p. 71.

²⁹ KEARNS, *l.c.* (n. 26), p. 934.

³⁰ In this brief *status quaestionis* I only looked at the appeasement and the vengeance motive. The motive of the humiliation is given no consideration.

³¹ TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 105-110; MARCOVICH, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 32; PARKER, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 138; P. DRÄGER, *Die Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios. Das zweite Zorn-Epos der griechischen Literatur*, Leipzig, 2001, p. 41; KEARNS, *l.c.* (n. 26), p. 934; HUNTER, *o.c.* (n. 1), 156-157; the *Argonautica* edition of E. LIVREA (1973), p. 153.

³² KITTREDGE, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 157; P. STENGEL, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*, Munich, 1920³ (*Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 5.3), p. 160; R.C. JEBB, *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part VI: The Electra, with critical notes, commentary, and translation in English prose*, Amsterdam, 1962 [Oxford, 1924], p. 66, 211-212.

³³ JOHNSTON, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 39, 157-159; W. KROLL & F. BOEHM, *s.v.* *Μασχαλισμός*, *RE XIV* (1930), col. 2060-2062; F. RÜSCHE, *Blut, Leben und Seele. Ihr Verhältnis nach Auffassung der griechischen*

answer the question and support either the appeasement³⁴ or the vengeance motive³⁵. Thus, while both of the motives have lived on in scholarly explanations, a univocal decisive answer has yet to be provided.

4. Μασχαλισμός in light of the *Argonautica*

Until now, this passage (IV, 477-479) has never been examined in the broader context of (the fourth book of) the *Argonautica*. However, a contextual analysis can shed light on the question of motive. As stated above, Apollonius has been regarded as the catalyst for the appeasement motive, as his description of the μασχαλισμός brought scholars to think of it as an atonement ritual. However, when one considers the context, there are hardly any arguments for such a motive. The few elements that may be indicative turn out to be very doubtful indeed. This makes it uncertain whether Apollonius really intended to present the μασχαλισμός as an appeasement ritual. In fact, there are but two elements that seem to favour the appeasement motive. First there is verse 479 in which, by way of ἰλάεσθαι³⁶, there is an explicit reference to an atonement. Second there is the word ἐξάργματα, which can be seen as indicating a sacrificial context. However, when one studies the passage in its broader context, it soon appears that there are other reasons for these two elements.

4.1. Two elements of appeasement?

4.1.1. ἰλάεσθαι

The reader notices at once that the μασχαλισμός is mentioned in one breath with another ritual: τρις δ' ἀπέλειξε φόνου, τρις δ' ἐξ ἄγος ἔπτυσ' ὀδόντων (IV, 478). Jason thrice licks up the blood of Apsyrtus, and thrice he spits it out. Spitting counted as a cathartic, apotropaic gesture: when the murderer spits out

und hellenistischen Antike, der Bibel und der alten Alexandrinischen Theologen. Eine Vorarbeit zur Religionsgeschichte des Opfers, Paderborn, 1930 (*Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums*, 5), p. 101-102; S. EITREM, *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer*, Hildesheim/New York, 1977 [Kristiana, 1915], p. 417 (indirectly); GARVIE, *o.c.* (n. 20), p. 163.

³⁴ ROHDE, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 584-585 (and VERNANT, *o.c.* [n. 28], p. 71 n. 37); VERMEULE, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 236; W. KASSIES, *De tocht van de Argonauten. Jason, Medea en het Gulden Vlies*, Amsterdam, 2000 [1996], p. 349; VIAN, *o.c.* (n. 1), p. 167; LSJ (1996), *s.v.* μασχαλισματα; E. RIESS, "Volksthümliches bei Artemidoros," *RbM* 49 (1894), p. 177-193 (p. 182-183).

³⁵ GOTSCHMICH, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 363; J.N. BREMMER, "Why did Medea kill her brother Apsyrtus?," in J.J. CLAUSS & S.I. JOHNSTON (eds.), *Medea: essays on Medea in myth, literature, philosophy and art*, Princeton, 1997, p. 83-100 (p. 84); R. GARLAND, *The Greek Way of Death*, London, 2001² [1985], p. 94; NILSSON, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 99; H. LLOYD-JONES, *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley et al., 1973 [1971] (*Sather Classical Lectures*, 41), p. 75; P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, Paris, 1968, II, p. 671; LSJ (1996), *s.v.* μασχαλιζω; DAIN, *o.c.* (n. 9), p. 154; G. KAIBEL, *Sophokles, Electra*, Sammlung wissenschaftlicher Commentare, Stuttgart, 1967 [1896], p. 141; MAZON, *o.c.* (n. 8), p. 96-97.

³⁶ The word ἰλάεσθαι is an epic variant for ἰλάσσεισθαι, and means 'to appease' (*cf.* LSJ [1996], *s.v.*).

the blood, he averts the ἄγος, the blood guilt³⁷. The underlying idea is that the murderer transfers the stain to the murdered person: “Spitting is an obvious and almost instinctive rite of purification”³⁸. It cannot be denied that verse 479 (with the ἰλάεσθαι) directly follows the spitting ritual and not the suggested *μασχαλισμός*. It is then highly possible that Apollonius is only talking about the former ritual when he says: ἦ θέμις αὐθέντησι δολοκτασίας ἰλάεσθαι³⁹. An analogous situation occurs in the scholion on this passage, which merely reformulates the passage of Apollonius. The last line of that scholion runs: τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίουν πρὸς τὸ ἐξιλιάσασθαι τὴν δολοφονίαν. It is more probable that this τοῦτο only refers to the line immediately preceding it, the spitting ritual, rather than to what is said in the beginning of the scholion. If the scholiast had meant that the mutilation too (which he discussed in the beginning of the scholion) was an appeasement ritual, then a ταῦτα rather than a τοῦτο would have been more appropriate.

Apollonius' own comment is thus deactivated as an argument for appeasement⁴⁰. This is a negative argument: it does not prove that the mentioned *μασχαλίζειν per se* is not an appeasement ritual, but it does allow for serious doubt to be put to Apollonius' presumed reference to that motive.

4.1.2. ἐξάργματα

According to a number of scholars (*cf. supra* n. 7, 32 and 34) the word ἐξάργματα seems to point to an atonement, a cathartic offering. This term, a creation of Apollonius', is coined out of other literary concerns and does not evoke the appeasement context as some readers argue. Of course, one may consider why several readers have thought of this context, due to the connection with the following verse 478. As mentioned before, the spitting actually evokes an appeasement ritual. This may offer an explanation as to why the word ἐξάργματα was interpreted in that manner. By mentioning πτύειν, an atmosphere of appeasement was created, an atmosphere in which the magical

³⁷ *Cf.* HUNTER, *o.c.* (n. 1), p. 157, BREMMER, *l.c.* (n. 35), p. 84 and TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 112; the latter author contends that the spitting also thwarts the revenge of the dead person. To the present argument this is hardly relevant.

³⁸ KITTREDGE, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 157.

³⁹ BYRE, *l.c.* (n. 4), p. 14 n. 35, considers this verse to be an ironic or cynical comment of Apollonius. This interpretation would fit the current argumentation, but since Byre neglects to motivate or substantiate his view, it will be left aside.

⁴⁰ In opposition to this thesis one could observe that the ἰλάεσθαι actually does denote an atonement offering. However, this verb refers to the practice of spitting (ἐξ ἄγος ἔπτωσ' ὀδόντων) and not to the wider scope of the *μασχαλισμός* (*cf.* the use of τοῦτο instead of ταῦτα). Additionally, the πτύειν in 478b is balanced by the ἀπολείγειν in 478a. Jason licks up the blood and spits it out, thus line 478 forms a complete whole, with the two opposite acts balancing each other. The act of deceiving, murdering and mutilating doesn't find its counterpart in the brief description of the spitting. This is a more extensive part, and in order to be in balance, it must have an extensive counterpart, which is in the scene in which Jason and Medea are cleansed by Circe (*cf. infra*).

ritual of the *μασχαλισμός* could also be set. This might be the reasoning of those who reason an appeasement motive from the term *ἐξάργματα*.

As outlined before, the word *ἐξάργματα* does not denote an appeasement, but merely a sacrificial context. The term is a synonym of *ἀπάργματα* and thus of *ἀπαρχαί*, and means ‘firstlings’ or ‘sacrifice’. This perspective has nothing to do with the *πτύειν* or atonement. One may wonder why Apollonius wrote this specific word *ἐξάργματα* and intended a sacrificial aspect in this passage. When the reader looks back only a few lines, he runs into several words which all denote a sacral context. The term is evoked by the sacral atmosphere pervading the wider context of the passage, and the specific implication of ‘sacrifice’ seems to be less significant than the general religious connotations of the word.

4.2. Murder and sacrifice

One must keep in mind what precedes this passage: Medea and Jason have murdered Medea’s stepbrother Apsyrtus. In IV, 464-467 Jason jumps out from his ambush with the bare sword in his hand. From there the passage continues: “As the slaughterer at a sacrifice kills a great, horned bull, so did Jason strike down his prey [...]. In the vestibule of the temple he [Apsyrtus] sank to his knees, and [...] his life ebbed away” (IV, 468-472a). The translation ‘slaughterer’ is unfortunate and vague; in Greek it reads *βουτύπος* (IV, 468) – anything but a common word. This term, when compared to the more frequent *βουφόνος* or *βοοθύτης*, is used specifically to denote the priest who at the Bouphonia was responsible for the killing of the ox in front of the altar of Zeus Polieus⁴¹. These Bouphonia were the most important event during the feast of the Dipolia⁴². At this occasion the *βουτύπος* would stealthily walk up behind the ox which was about to be sacrificed and kill it with one mighty blow⁴³. The parallel to Jason and Apsyrtus speaks for itself, for the poet himself explicitly states that “the son of Aison leapt from his cunning ambush, the naked sword-blade raised in his hand” (IV, 464-465a).

By choosing the *terminus technicus* *βουτύπος*, Apollonius compares Jason to an official sacrificial priest. In this way he places the murder in a sacrificial context. It is no coincidence that the scene takes place in sacred territory, viz. the pronaos of Artemis’ temple (IV, 469-470), as it resembles the Bouphonia,

⁴¹ J.R. PORTER, “Tiptoeing through the Corpses: Euripides’ *Electra*, Apollonius, and the *Bouphonia*,” *GRBS* 31 (1990), p. 266. Cf. *LSJ* (1996), s.v. *βουτύπος*: “ox-butcher, slaughterer [...]”; esp. of the priest at the Dipolia (cf. *βουφόνια*) [...]” and also Schol. Apoll. Rh., *Arg.* II, 91 (ed. WENDEL [1974], p. 131): *βουτύπος δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ τοὺς θυομένους βούς τῷ πελέκει τύπτων κατὰ τοῦ αὐχένος*.

⁴² Cf. F.P. WALTON, s.v. “Dipolieia,” *Lexicon der alten Welt* (1965), col. 762 and P. STENGEL, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*, Leipzig/Berlin, 1910, p. 203-221.

⁴³ PORTER, *l.c.* (n. 40), p. 276.

which take place at the altar of Zeus Polieus⁴⁴. Moreover, murder in poetry is often looked upon as a perverted sacrifice⁴⁵ and the Bouphonia seem to form a bridge between the twin phenomena of murder and sacrifice. “The term Bouphonia means ‘murder [φόνος] of the ox [βοῦς]’ and hence from the outset already calls into question the division between murder and sacrifice”⁴⁶. Furthermore, Apollonius uses the word φόνος in verse 478 (ἀπέλειξε φόνου), directly after the description of the μασχαλισμός. Thus it is made clear that it is hard to discriminate between murder and sacrifice in this entire passage.

In that way, the murder of Apsyrtus is already steeped in the atmosphere of a sacrificial rite prior to the μασχαλισμός passage. This knowledge can offer an explanation for the choice of the word ἐξάργματα: it is all but likely that the evoked sacrificial atmosphere still lasted nine verses later and tempted Apollonius to choose a term which fits in this context. Specifically, this means that the significance of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘firstlings’ can be explained as echoes of the preceding context. In verse 477 then, the term ἐξάργματα is coined out of literary concerns, and is not used in the literal sense of referring to a sacrifice.

It thus may be proved that in the narrower scope of the passage 477-479, the μασχαλισμός is not necessarily presented as an appeasement ritual, since the two factors which support this, the words ἰλάεσθαι and ἐξάργματα, can be justified otherwise. The appeasement perspective, which some scholars read into the term ἐξάργματα, actually relies on nothing but the πτύειν ritual, and is even unexpected in the scope of Greek sacrificial ritual⁴⁷. Within the broader framework of the fourth book, there are still more elements that plead against the appeasement motive and in favour of the vengeance motive.

4.3. In favour of the vengeance motive

One obvious argument pleads for the application of the vengeance motive. One must keep in mind why Medea and Jason killed Apsyrtus in the first place, viz. so that the Argonauts could escape from their pursuers. The latter had cornered the Argo sailors, and “the Minyans would have succumbed in grievous war, a small force overcome by a larger one” (IV, 338-339a). That is why Jason gets the idea to murder their leader Apsyrtus, because, as he reasons, “the local peoples will not be so hostile to us in their desire to please the Colchians, when the leader [...] is not there” (IV, 405b-406; cf. also IV, 499b-502).

⁴⁴ PORTER, *l.c.* (n. 40), p. 264, 266. The cleansing of Jason’s sword by Circe (IV, 696-687a) would then correspond to the purification of the axe at the Bouphonia, cf. R. PARKER, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in early Greek Religion*, Oxford, 1983, p. 117 n. 55.

⁴⁵ PARKER, *l.c.* (n. 2), p. 138.

⁴⁶ VERNANT, *o.c.* (n. 28), p. 298.

⁴⁷ I am indebted to Dr. Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge for her help in developing several points in the foregoing argumentation.

It is entirely in the interest of the Argonauts that the situation remains as it is: if the ghost of the murdered Apsyrtus would take revenge and reassemble the Colchians in one way or other, the Greeks would have no chance. Thus, it is logical that Jason would have performed the *μασχαλισμός* in order to hold off the revenge of Apsyrtus' ghost. If the victim could still come to take vengeance, there would have been no purpose to the murder.

4.4. Against the appeasement motive

In addition, various factors plead against the application of the appeasement motive. Each of the three following observations confirms the same crucial point, that Jason is unclean after verses 477-479 and he and Medea are not purified. This is totally at odds with the appeasement motive. Briefly, Jason still needs to be purified, he gives evidence of the qualities of a defiled person typical to Greek religion, and the *μασχαλισμός* is followed by a second defilement.

4.4.1. Postponed purification

In verses IV, 557-561 (after the *μασχαλισμός* passage), Zeus addresses the Argonauts: “When the tall body of Apsyrtos crashed to the ground in death, Zeus himself, the king of the gods, was no doubt seized by anger at what they had done. He devised that they [the Argonauts] should be cleansed of the blood of the murder by the skill of Aiaian Kirke, and return home after enduring numberless sufferings. None of the heroes knew this [...]”. Shortly after this passage the fearful Argonauts are advised by the talking mast of the *Argo*: “[the voice] said that they could not escape from their suffering on the vast ocean and the terrible storms until Kirke had cleansed them from the pitiless murder of Apsyrtos” (IV, 585b-588a). It is emphasized twice that Jason *cum suis* still need to be cleansed, and the blood guilt still stains them. Thus it is clear that Jason and Medea are as yet impure after the mutilation.

These two passages are not just gap fillers by Apollonius. He clearly points this out by actively describing the cleansing by Circe a few lines later. Apollonius pays a great deal of attention to the purification of Jason and Medea, in one of the most remarkable scenes of the epic. He devotes nearly one hundred verses to the episode, which contains many magical elements (IV, 659-752). It is worth mentioning that a purification ritual like the one described in this passage does not appear anywhere in the Homeric epics. One gets the impression that Homer actually avoids the rendering of such primitive, bloody religious customs⁴⁸, while Apollonius the scholar seizes the occasion to include such a rare episode. It would be strange if he would cut the ground from under his own feet by referring shortly and very obscurely to the theme of the magical

⁴⁸ Cf. KASSIES, *o.c.* (n. 34), p. 353.

appeasement ritual before this passage, with the *μασχαλισμός*. The cleansing itself does not need to be dwelt on, it is sufficient for this argument to know that it occurs. Precisely by its extensive and explicit presence in the text, the purification episode proves that no similar event has occurred before.

In the episode with Circe, Apollonius leaves no doubt that Jason and Medea indeed are unclean. His choice of words makes the defiled status of Jason and Medea perfectly clear, e.g. *ἀλιτροσύναις* [...] *φόνιοιο* (v. 699), *λύματα* (v. 710) and *μεμιασμένοι αἶματι* (v. 716). The poet is absolutely clear that they have attained this defiled status through the guileful murder of Medea's own brother (cf. *φόνιοιο* [v. 699], *ἀνδροφόνιοισιν* [v. 701] and *ἀτρέπτοιο* [...] *φόνιοιο* [v. 704]). Therefore, Circe will make an appeal to Zeus, the god of purification (*Καθάριστον* [...] *Ζῆνα*, vv. 709-710).

Thus, it is beyond question that the actual cleansing of Jason and Medea takes place here, and nowhere else. Apollonius says this very clearly in verse 702: *ἀπολυμαίνονται*⁴⁹. One must also keep the warnings of Zeus and the Argo's mast in mind, who both said explicitly that the murderers needed to be purified by Circe. This purification is obviously stressed by the words *ἀπονηψαμένους* (v. 560) and *νίψειεν* (v. 588). These commands are fulfilled in the Circe episode, meaning that Jason could not have atoned for the murder directly afterwards with the *μασχαλίζειν*. The fact that purification happens with Circe by means of offerings is made clear: *λυτήριον* [...] *φόνιοιο* ('appeasement sacrifice for the murder', v. 704) and *μείλικτρα* ('propitiation offerings', v. 712).

Shortly after the *μασχαλισμός* passage, the reader is notified twice by a divine speaker of the defiled status of Jason and Medea. Purification seems necessary, and comes in the passage with Circe, together with an appeasement sacrifice. It seems clear that such a thorough cleansing and reconciliation would be illogical if Jason had already atoned for the murder by disfiguring Apsyrtus.

4.4.2. Protagonists in the background

It is also striking that, between the death of Apsyrtus and the purification by Circe, Jason and Medea hardly appear in the story. Once they have rejoined the Argo sailors after the murder, it is mentioned only briefly that Medea joins the deliberating men (IV, 493b-494a). Her name is not even mentioned, she is but a *κούρη*. From then on, she is consequently ignored until she steps into the limelight again in verse 689 (*Κολχίδα κούρη*). Here too her name goes unmentioned and is not spoken again until verse 815, *after* the purification with Circe.

Jason too, although leader of the Argonauts, is strikingly absent. After the murder of Apsyrtus it is not him, but Peleus who immediately makes the decisions (IV, 494b). It is also Peleus who sets out the further plans (IV, 495-

⁴⁹ Cf. LSJ (1996), s.v. *ἀπολυμαίνομαι*: "cleanse oneself by bathing, esp. from an ἄγος [...]."

503), and generally the ‘young men’ who agree (νέοι, IV, 503). Jason disappears anonymously into the group. The only time he appears again is where the past is concerned in IV, 527-536. Even there he is not referred to *nominatim*, as only his patronymic Αἰσονίδῃ is mentioned (IV, 530). Then, after Peleus’ sudden assumption of leadership, actions are taken among others by Polydeuces and Castor (IV, 588-596), but remarkably never by Jason, the actual captain of the expedition. The first action which Jason himself performs is planting his sword in the ground in Circe’s house as a sign that it needs to be purified.

Nonetheless, there are enough occasions for Apollonius to involve Medea as well as Jason in the story between the *μασχαλισμός* and the purification with Circe. For example, when he shortly introduces the sorceress Circe (IV, 590b-591), he could have said that she is Medea’s aunt, as in Hellenism both magicians were closely associated with one another⁵⁰. Likewise, when Apollonius renders the regulations of Zeus and the mast of the Argo, that Jason and Medea need to be cleansed, it would have been normal and obvious to mention them at that point. Yet, he deliberately leaves them out of the narrative. This silence is so striking that it seems practically impossible that the poet would use it without a good reason. The blatant absence of Jason and Medea could well be an indication of the fact that they are still defiled.

Robert Parker, who has examined defilement and purification in Greek religion, leaves no doubt about the status of the stained person: “That the blood of his victim clings to the hand of a murderer, and, until cleansed, demands his seclusion from society, is a belief attested in a bewildering variety of literary, oratorical, historical, mythographical, and pictorial sources”⁵¹. The *μίασμα*, the *ἄγος*, which clings to the murderer, is contagious. Applying this view to this passage, it immediately becomes clear why Apollonius puts Jason and Medea, both responsible for Apsyrtus’ death, aside: the stain of the murder still sticks to them, and so they are both taboo. As long as the blood guilt clings to them, they may not actively participate or even speak⁵². After the purification with Circe, Jason and Medea regain their active roles, suggesting that the atonement of the murder does *not* occur with the mutilation. Again the appeasement motive does not hold.

⁵⁰ For example, some Hellenistic beliefs make Circe and Medea sisters, with the magic goddess Hecate as their mother (cf. H. PARRY, *Thebes: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry*, Lanham et al., 1992, p. 49).

⁵¹ PARKER, *o.c.* (n. 43), p. 104. Cf. TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 119: “[der Mörder] ist tabu, d.h. er wird von der übrigen Gesellschaft ausgeschlossen, isoliert, um seine Mitmenschen nicht anzustecken.”

⁵² Cf. TEUFEL, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 120: “über den ungereinigten Mörder [ist] das Redeverbot verhängt.”

4.4.3. Double ἄγος

Supposing that Jason would disfigure Apsyrtus in order to cleanse himself and rid himself of the stain, it would be strange if immediately after that ritual another contamination would follow. Nevertheless, this is what happens, as IV, 480-481 reads: ὑγρὸν δ' ἐν γαίῃ κρύψεν νέκυν, ἔνθ' ἔτι νῦν περ | κείται ὀστέα κείνα μετ' Ἀψυρτεῦσιν – “he buried the corpse in the ground while it was still fresh; to this day those bones lie among the Apsyrtis”. This description must be compared to Apollonius' very explicit comment on the funeral rituals of the Colchians, that it is not proper for them to bury the dead in the earth (*cf.* III, 202-209).

For Apsyrtus to be buried according to the customs of his people, he should have been hung from a tree. Jason, however, is portrayed putting the Colchian captain under the ground without further ado (for the corpse is still humid, ὑγρόν!), “unter Nichtbeachtung der kolchischen Luft-/ Baum-/ Fellbestattung”⁵³. According to Colchian belief such a funeral is a serious guilt: ἄγος Κόλχοισιν (III, 203)⁵⁴. Thus, it would be illogical for Jason to first avert an ἄγος only to create a new one immediately afterwards.

Therefore, this burial adds to the evidence against the appeasement motive, but the reader can ask why Jason buries the corpse. After all, he could just leave the body be. It is highly plausible that Jason wanted to humiliate Apsyrtus *post mortem* by this burial, especially since in combination with a burial against Colchian customs, the *μασχαλισμός* forms “an absolute inversion of proper funerary rites”⁵⁵. Thus, Apsyrtus is deprived of his *καλὸς θάνατος*. Furthermore, it seems that a psychological motive is also in play here which supports the vengeance motive. Instinctively, Jason wants to get rid of his victim as soon as possible. In some sort of magical reflex⁵⁶, the murderer wants to remove the corpse of his enemy and to get it out of his sight. In the words of Sarah Johnston, “The swiftness of burial reflects not only the obvious need to remove a decomposing corpse quickly but the perception that the individual no longer belonged amongst the living”⁵⁷. Jason wants to remove Apsyrtus from the surroundings and send him quickly to the underworld, to feel more secure. By executing this form of burial, Jason gains additional protection from the

⁵³ DRÄGER, *o.c.* (n. 31), p. 41.

⁵⁴ One cannot suggest that Jason was unaware of this form of burial. For it is him who walked across the Plain of Circe, where the bodies of the Colchian men were hanging in the trees (III, 198b-200)! Jason knowingly does not comply to these Colchian practices, and buries Apsyrtus in a shameful manner.

⁵⁵ JOHNSTON, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 158.

⁵⁶ In accordance with that notion of magic that says that by performing a very concrete act, one tries to affect the course of things; *pace* James Frazer's definition of ‘sympathetic magic’: *cf.* J.G. FRAZER, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, Hertfordshire, 1993 [London, 1922], p. 11-48 (p. 12) and E. CSAPO, *Theories of Mythology*, Malden *et al.*, 2005, p. 36-43 (p. 38-40).

⁵⁷ JOHNSTON, *o.c.* (n. 2), p. 40.

revenge of the deceased. So the double ἄγος not only weakens the appeasement motive, but also supports the vengeance motive.

Conclusion

A contextual study of IV, 477-479 has supported the interpretation that Jason killed Apsyrtus in a cunning way, and prior to burying him against the custom of his people, he cut the corpse into pieces, not to atone for the murder but to avoid the victim's revenge. Through their striking absence in the ensuing narrative, Jason and Medea are presented as still being defiled. It is only after the purification with Circe that they become clean again and return to participate in the actions, and only then is the murder truly appeased.

It seems clear that Apollonius does not intend to suggest the appeasement motive. The presence of the two words which may contradict this conclusion, ἰλάεσθαι and ἐξάργματα, may be explained otherwise in light of the context. Therefore, Jason cuts Apsyrtus' corpse into pieces not in order to make an atonement sacrifice, but to escape the latter's revenge. Moreover, the motive of humiliation still has a part to play, as Apsyrtus is clearly denied a καλὸς θάνατος.

Until now, Apollonius has been traditionally considered the starting point of the appeasement motive. All secondary sources which argue for this motive derived from the Hellenistic poet. However, in the *Argonautica* passage a motive of averting revenge is in fact more likely, and it appears that the lexicographers, glossators and scholiasts interpreted Apollonius incorrectly⁵⁸. Therefore, it seems that this one short passage from the *Argonautica* was responsible for the development of a sidetrack in ancient and modern reflections on the phenomenon of the μασχαλισμός.

Reinhart CEULEMANS

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Faculty of Theology
Sint-Michielsstraat, 6
BE – 3000 LEUVEN
E-mail: reinhart.ceulemans@theo.kuleuven.be

⁵⁸ Of course the possibility always exists that they had a different source in mind – after all, so much literature has disappeared. But this seems rather improbable, as in none of those writings another author or writing is actually mentioned.