

METAPOETIC REFLECTIONS IN THREE *AETIA* OF THE *ARGONAUTICA*

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This article studies three *aetia* in the *Argonautica* that have metapoetic significance as comments on Apollonius' Callimachean poetics. In the first *aetion* (1.1132–1139), the Pyrrhic dance reflects the Argonauts' key role as active agents in the creation of the plot and shows its Callimachean allegiance in the repurposing of traditional martial imagery. In the second one (4.1719–1730), the meagerness of the Argonauts' offering to Apollo at Anaphe and the light jesting between Medea's maidens and the Argonauts are programmatic reflections of the 'lean' poetics advocated by Callimachus in the *Aetia* 'prologue' (fr. 1). The third *aetion* (4.1765–1772), by closing the *Argonautica* in correspondence with the beginning of Callimachus' *Aetia*, stresses the close connection between Apollonius and Callimachus. In it, the quick pace, lightness and playfulness of the *hydrophoria* at Aegina mirrors the fast coming to an end and happy tone that closes the *Argonautica*.

Keywords: metapoetry; *aetia*; Callimachean poetics; piety.

It is already well established that Apollonius in his *Argonautica* adopts a broadly Callimachean poetics to produce a modern, Alexandrian epic.¹ This article seeks to extend our understanding of the relationship between Apollonius and Callimachus by analyzing three *aetia* that allow us to better understand Apollonius' Callimachean allegiance.²

The role of *aetia* in Apollonius' *Argonautica* is not as well-developed as it is for Callimachus' *Aetia*. In the late 20th century, scholars saw the *aetia* in the *Argonautica* as a manifestation of Apollonius' erudition.³ The inclusion of singular and curious references, a common practice in Hellenistic poetry, was associated

¹ DeForest 1994.

² The *aetia* ('the causes') are short narrations that explain the origin of an object, rite or custom, placed at the time of the narration, by telling the myth or legend that caused its creation and that belongs to a remote past. Valverde Sánchez 1989:37 defines *aetion* as 'the literary unit in which the origin of an object is explained by means of a myth or legend that relates its archetype' (my translation).

³ Valverde Sánchez 1989:107 explains that 'only in Alexandrian times, such particularly scientific, ethnological descriptions could have a place in heroic epic' (my translation).

with authors confined to the ‘ivory tower’.⁴ Stephens (2018:87) has recently expressed the mistake involved in this assumption as ‘the result of reading Callimachus as a fragment and unconsciously filtering him through the experience of Classical Athens and / or later Roman poetry’.

Now the learned references are seen more in service of a Ptolemaic redefinition of the world.⁵ Stephens understands the *aetia* as the ‘function of certain narrative strategies or types’.⁶ Since Alexandria was a city in Egypt, the land which Herodotus represented as the cultural inverse of Greece, ‘creating a narrative that identifies, articulates and juxtaposes Greek behaviours with non-Greek would have made good strategic sense’.⁷

Both Apollonius and Callimachus use *aetia* and both tell the story of the Argonauts. There is an intimate and integrated relationship between the narratives of Callimachus and Apollonius; Callimachus starts his *Aetia* with an Argo adventure at Anaphe, the same location where Apollonius ends his epic.⁸ Modern critics have rejected the idea of a quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius grounded on the poetological differences between the two poets. To Stephens, their relationship is rather one of mutual exchange than hostility, both taking part in ‘a context of poetic experimentation in how to tell culturally relevant tales’.⁹

This article argues that three *aetia* in Apollonius’ *Argonautica* have metapoetic significance as comments on the *Argonautica*’s Callimachean values and goals, and that they are, therefore, part of a broader statement of allegiance to Callimachus’ poetics. The three *aetia*, which do not originate from the presence or death of an Argonaut in a location,¹⁰ but from a minor episode in which the Argonauts perform a collective task, are the following: the *aetion* of *Arg.* 1.1132–1139, which explains the worship of Rhea by the Phrygians from a magic dance performed by the Argonauts; the *aetion* of *Arg.* 4.1719–1730, an account of the origin of the *aeschrologia* in the worship of Apollo at Anaphe originating in the mockery and interchanges between Medea’s maidens and the Argonauts; and the

⁴ The term ‘ivory tower’ expresses well the activity of authors who were composing sophisticated works for aesthetic pleasure to be read by other learned authors.

⁵ Mori 2008a:149–170; Stephens 2003:6–19; Stephens 2008:95–114.

⁶ Stephens 2018:97.

⁷ Stephens 2018:98.

⁸ Stephens 2018:116.

⁹ Stephens 2018:116.

¹⁰ Other *aetia* are motivated by the presence of the Argonauts or by the tombs established in a place. Thus, for example, the coast from where the Argonauts leave is called ‘Sailing of the Argo’ (*Arg.* 1.591); the cave where the marriage of Jason and Medea takes place is called the ‘Cave of Medea’ (*Arg.* 4.1153–1154). The tomb of the prophet Idmon remains as a visible marker to men of later generations (*Arg.* 2.844–850).

aetion of *Arg.* 4.1766–1772 that explains how the Argonauts began the tradition of vying in the *hydrophoria* at Aegina.

Before starting with the examination of these *aetia* as metapoetic devices, it is worth introducing a brief explanation of the *Argonautica* as a self-conscious poem. Hunter refers to the number of times the poet acknowledges poetic responsibility and defines the poem as ‘a demonstration (an *epideixis*) of the techniques and challenges of epic narration’.¹¹ Clare states that ‘on several occasions Apollonius reflects explicitly upon his duties and responsibilities in his capacity as narrator’.¹² Some scholars have identified the journey of the Argonauts and the poem itself.¹³ Narration as act and narrative as story have been considered intertwined to the point of being the same thing.¹⁴ The beginning and end of the poem coincide with the beginning and end of the journey.¹⁵ Also lines 1775–1776 of Book 4 (ἤδη γὰρ ἐπὶ κλυτὰ πείραθ’ ἰκάνω / ὑμετέρων καμάτων, ‘For now I come to the glorious end of your toils’¹⁶) can be interpreted metapoetically as a reference to the end of the poem, a product of much effort.¹⁷

The three *aetia* considered in this article can function as self-reflexive passages that comment on the poetic values of the poem. In this way, they can be added to the metapoetic and self-conscious elements of the poem. At the same time, they state the poem’s allegiance to Callimachean poetics. Stephens explains what is understood by Callimachean poetics:

Alexandrian aesthetics for the most part has been deemed one of *leptotes* of the slender, the small, eschewing the big topics found in Homer and the

¹¹ Hunter 1993:96–101.

¹² Clare 2002:261.

¹³ Albis 1996:48 points out that, when the heroes leave Pagasae, the narrator compares the Argonauts rowing to the strains of Orpheus’ cithara with young people dancing in honor of Apollo (*Arg.* 1.569–579) and that ‘the connection is further encouraged by the specification that the god honored by the simile’s dance is Phoebus, the very god invoked at the start of the epic’. Thalmann 2011:30 states that “paths” can refer metapoetically to the narrative itself as well as to the Argonauts’ course’. Clare 2002:25 declares that ‘to begin from Apollo in terms of poetic inspiration is also to begin from Apollo in terms of plot’. Murray 2005:90 assimilates the *Argonautica* to the ship *Argo*, which is characterized as εὐζυγος (‘well-benched’), an epithet that refers to the excellence and navigability of the ship.

¹⁴ Goldhill 1991:187.

¹⁵ Hunter 2008:135.

¹⁶ In this article I use the text of Race 2008 *passim*. Translations are my own.

¹⁷ Hellenistic poets usually refer to their works as toils. In Theocritus’ *Idyll* 15.80 Praxinoa declares that the weavers ἐπόνασαν (worked out) the tapestries; in *Idyll* 7.51, the verb ἔκτονέω is used by Lycidas to refer to his bucolic song; in *Mimiamb* 8, Herodas refers to his poems as ‘toils’ (μόχθος, 71).

classical poets. Their generic experimentation, apart from Apollonius, was for the most part with small-format writing: epigram; hymns and idylls that were narratives of no more than a 100 or so lines; Callimachus' longer *Aetia* (4–6000 lines) was nevertheless a series of more than 50 individual stories. Within these new forms, characters were often non-heroic (herdsmen, Hecale, Molorchus) or, if famous figures of myth (Heracles, the Argonauts, the Dioscuri), presented in incidents that moved them closer to the ordinary or focused on homely details of their vast mythic portfolios.¹⁸

A 'Callimachean' aesthetics has been derived from Callimachus' own statements in his works: the poet expresses his aesthetic position in his own authorial persona at the start of the *Aetia*, as also in his *Hymn to Apollo* and the *Iambus* 13.¹⁹

In the *aetion* of *Arg.* 1.1132–1139, the magic dance comments, especially, on the active role of the Argonauts in creating the plot and on the poem as performance, but it also reflects the refashioning of traditional themes in the poem,²⁰ and the participation of the divine world in the poetic creation. In the second *aetion*, the meagerness of the Argonauts' offering to Apollo at Anaphe and the jesting of Medea's maidens reflect the 'lean' poetics advocated by Callimachus in the *Aetia* 'prologue' (fr. 1). Finally, the quick pace, lightness and playfulness of the *hydrophoria* at Aegina (4.1765–1772), mirrors the fast coming to an end of the poem and Apollonius' Callimachean allegiance in its light themes and tone that correspond to the general tone of the end of the poem. In addition, this *aetion* corresponds directly to the beginning of Callimachus' *Aetia* which starts with the same *aetion* and with the story of the Argonauts. In the three episodes the rituals receive the favor of the divine world, which indicates the approval of the new poetry.

Regarding the role of the *aetia* in these three episodes, they correspond to the use of *aetia* in the period, generally understood to point to a connection between the heroic past and the Ptolemaic present. Not all rituals in Callimachus are profound; as Stephens notes: 'they seem to create a tapestry of Greek behaviours that are sometimes eccentric or marginal', just as the behaviours Greeks encountered in Alexandria were likewise labelled by earlier Greeks.²¹ The *aetia* studied in this article fit into these categories of being eccentric and rare, and thus make the Greek adventure closer to the everyday life of the audience. But, besides contributing to Ptolemaic self-definition, they are also markers of Callimachean poetics in a poem that ends on a non-Homeric, Callimachean tone. The

¹⁸ Stephens 2018:24.

¹⁹ Stephens 2018:26–27.

²⁰ Cf. Hunter 1993:15–25.

²¹ Stephens 2018:98.

Argonautica goes through a process of detachment from Homeric epic standards to a confirmation of its Callimachean identity. The combination of two *aetia* at the end of the poem could be intentional to emphasize Apollonius' Callimachean allegiance.

1. *The aetion of Arg. 1.1132–1139*

This *aetion* accounts for a custom in the worship of Rhea. After departing from Lemnos, the Argonauts land among the Doliones, whose king Cyzicus is hospitable and welcoming. They depart, lose their bearings, and land again in the same place at night. In the darkness the Doliones mistake them for enemies and start to attack them. The Argonauts kill many Doliones, including king Cyzicus, at which point Cyzicus' wife kills herself. When dawn arrives, the Argonauts realize their terrible mistake. Afterward, strong winds blow continuously for twelve days and nights preventing them from sailing. On the following night, a halcyon appears and foretells that the winds will drop. Mopsus understands the happy omen and tells Jason that it is necessary to appease Rhea, the mother of the gods. While the Argonauts are making libations and praying, Orpheus orders them to dance an armed dance and to beat the swords on their shields to dissipate the ill-omened sound of the continuous lamentations of the Doliones for their king Cyzicus. At this point, Apollonius introduces the *aetion*, stating that, for this reason, the Phrygians still worship Rhea with the magic-wheel and drum.

ἄμυδις δὲ νέοι Ὀρφεῖος ἀνωγῆ
 σκαίροντες βηταρμὸν ἐνόπλιον ὠρχήσαντο,
 καὶ σάκεα ξιφέεσσιν ἐπέκτυπον, ὥς κεν ἰωὴ
 δύσφημος πλάζοιτο δι' ἠέρος, ἦν ἔτι λαοὶ
 κηδεῖν βασιλῆος ἀνέστενον. ἔνθεν ἔσαιε
 ῥόμβω καὶ τυπάνῳ Πρῆϊν Φρύγες ἰλάσκονται.

At the same time the young heroes, on the instruction of Orpheus, leaping, danced an armed dance and they made noise with their swords on the shields so that the ill-omened cry would wander through the air, which still the people were groaning in grief for their king. Hence forever the Phrygians propitiate Rhea with the magic-wheel and the drum. (Arg.1.1134–1139)

This *aetion* presents as the origin of the Phrygian rite the armed dance performed by the Argonauts. Apollonius inserts it in a poem in which magic has a prominent role through the actions of Medea. Clare (2002:231) underscores the importance of Orpheus in the poem, who, according to him, is given first place in the Catalogue of Heroes, to mark the importance of magic and music in the poem. Carspecken (1952:48) proposes a similar idea, when he declares that Orpheus, with his divine

gift of music, standing first, suggests the magical theme that pervades the whole poem. Orpheus' music establishes a magical relationship with nature through song. In *Arg.* 1.569–179, he plays the lyre and sings, and fish begin to follow the ship darting through the sea. In *Arg.* 1.512–515, Orpheus delivers a song before the departure from Pagasae, which has a powerful and positive influence over his comrades who stop arguing and listen attentively to the song as if they were under a spell. In *Arg.* 4.903–911, Orpheus' musical performance against the Sirens helps the expedition move on.

In addition, critics have underscored the poetic power of Orpheus,²² and how, like Phineus, he also resembles the poet of the *Argonautica* through the art of poetry. Albis (1996:29) states that it is Apollo who helps to make the connection between Orpheus and the poet by means of his divine inspiration. This special connection is also recognized by Klooster.²³ Phillips points out that 'by frequently making Orpheus assist the Argonauts in pursuing their quest, Apollonius intimates a correspondence between Orpheus and his own narrative agency', and thereby participates in the tradition that employs Orpheus as the measure of poetic prowess.²⁴

In *Arg.* 1.536–541, the Argonauts row to the sound of Orpheus' lyre, an action that is compared to a dance for Apollo. As Klooster remarks, 'this implies that the whole journey of the Argonauts is in some sense a ceremony in honor of the god Apollo, just as the song of this entire exploit, the *Argonautica*, is presented as a hymn in his honor [...]'.²⁵ In the *action* of *Arg.* 1.1132–1139, Apollo is the source that inspires Orpheus' words and the armed dance. Since this god is also the cause and inspiration of the *Argonautica*, the armed dance can be interpreted as a reflection of the poem, a larger performance in which the characters have an active role together with the narrator.²⁶

The *scholia* to the passage we are concerned with explain that Orpheus has ordered the performance of a πυρρίχην ὄρχησιν, a 'war dance'.²⁷ The pyrrhic dance, which was traditionally a dance to celebrate a military victory,²⁸ in this passage acquires a new significance. It has an apotropaic function: it is intended to prevent

²² Cf. Klooster 2011:82–91 for a discussion of Orpheus as poetic model.

²³ Klooster 2011:87 underlines the fundamental role of Apollo to both the expedition and the narrator, who dedicates the poem to him.

²⁴ Phillips 2020:57.

²⁵ Klooster 2011:83–84.

²⁶ Cf. Hunter 1993:12 on how Jason does not conform to Aristotelian standards of realistic character.

²⁷ Cf. Brunkii 1813:114.

²⁸ This dance was believed to have been first performed by Athena herself in celebration of her and her fellow Olympians' epic victory over the Giants.

evil and bad luck, and thus acts like a magic spell that can make evil disappear. It is worth noting that the Argonauts produce a war song and dance after their most ‘Homeric’ battle has gone dreadfully wrong and they use their weapons for a new purpose. The novel use of weapons that occurs in different moments of the *Argonautica* is also a central topic of the poem and corresponds to the Callimachean principle of refashioning traditional themes in an unheroic form.²⁹

Returning now to the presence of magic and poetry in our episode, it is worth noting that the drowning out of the lamentations of the people for the death of Cyzicus has a parallel in *Arg.* 4.885–921, where the quick and loud tune Orpheus plays with his lyre overpowers the Sirens’ voices. Hunter (2015:207, *Arg.* 4.904–905) notes how Orpheus functions as the Sirens’ most obvious opponent (*cf.* 1.27–31), while Phillips (2020:120) points out that ‘Orpheus’ overcoming reads easily as a (quite possibly humorous, self-deprecatory) figure for Apollonius’ own competitive relation with Homer, and the picture of the Sirens and Orpheus engaged in simultaneous “performance” invites a connection with Apollonius’ own poetics’. It is possible then to see Orpheus’ song as a reflection of Apollonius’ poetry, which defeats Homeric enchantment.

In addition, in this episode, winds acquire a poetic significance. We read that rough blustery winds (τρηχεῖα ἄελλαι) prevent the Argonauts from sailing (*Arg.* 1.1078–1079). Wind was assimilated to poetic creation in the Greek tradition from the archaic period onwards.³⁰ Albis (1996:49) states that the association between journey and poetry is encouraged by Apollonius’ description of the breeze as λιγύς (*Arg.* 1.566), an adjective that since Homer was used with words connected to poetry and music. In the *aetion* of Book 1, the adjective used to describe the winds is τραχύς (‘blustery’) and would suit the description of a cracking voice.³¹ Winds are characterized by adjectives that refer to their sound and thus are good elements to represent poetic inspiration or disruption. In addition, in

²⁹ In *Arg.* 1.544–546 the weapons shine and illuminate the way in the sea. In *Arg.* 2.1047–1067 the Argonauts use the shields and spears to cover themselves from the feathers of birds and they shout and make great noise with the weapons to frighten the birds with the terrible din. In Jason’s cloak, Aphrodite uses Ares’ shield as a mirror (*Arg.* 1.745–746). In Book 3 Jason uses his weapons to yoke the bulls, and also to fight against the men born from the earth, which are novel reasons. In addition, Jason uses the helmet as a bowl where he puts the dragons’ teeth and the spear as a goad for the bulls. Afterwards, he uses the helmet as a vessel to drink water from the river. He uses also the shield cunningly to hide himself when he has thrown the stone among the men raised from the earth. *Cf.* Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004:271–282 on the innovative use of weapons in Jason’s unusual *aristeia*.

³⁰ On the relationship between ‘inspiration’ and ‘breathe’ in Hesiod and Pindar, see Albis 1996:50.

³¹ Xenophon *Anab.* 2.9 uses this adjective to refer to the harsh voice of Clearchus.

the *Argonautica* in general, the winds that prevent the journey from continuing also cut off poetic inspiration.³²

To recover the prosperous winds, Orpheus recommends appeasing Rhea, a goddess who can provide the flow and ease their need. The powers of the goddess, namely fertility, the flow of water, and peace, enable the continuation of the journey: ‘the trees shed unspeakably abundant fruit’ (δένδρεα μὲν καρπὸν χέον ἄσπετον, *Arg.* 1.1142), ‘the earth of its own accord produced flowers from the tender grass’ (αὐτομάτη φύε γαῖα τερείνης ἄνθεα ποίης, *Arg.* 1.1143). Most importantly, the goddess performs a miracle, ‘for never before had the Dindymum flowed with water, but then it gushed forth for them without ceasing from the arid peak in this manner’ (ἐπεὶ οὐ τι παροίτερον ὕδατι νᾶεν / Δίνδυμον, ἀλλὰ σφιν τότε ἀνέβραχε διψάδος αὐτως / ἐκ κορυφῆς ἄλληκτον, *Arg.* 1.1146–1148), for which it was called Jason’s spring by the neighboring people. The description of natural elements in this passage represents metaphorically the experiences of poetic inspiration. When inspired, a poet composes with fluency, ease, and speed. Murray underscores that ‘fluency of composition is a common characteristic of inspiration in all periods’, and mentions that many critics have pointed out the comparison of a flowing speech with a river, a parallel that goes back to Homer’s *Iliad* 1.249, where it is said that from Nestor’s mouth flowed (ρέεν) speech sweeter than honey.

The association of water and poetic inspiration is common in Greek literature. In *Theogony* 1–8, Hesiod refers to Hippocrene, Permessus, and Olmeus on Helicon as springs of the Muses; Homer is said by Moschus to have drunk from the Hippocrene fountain (‘Lament for Bion’, 76–78).³³ Crowther (1979:2) reminds us that ‘the earliest poet to speak of his own inspiration from holy streams, Pindar, [...] drinks from Thebe while composing his poetry (*O.* 6.84–87)’. In the Hellenistic period, Theocritus assigns powers of inspiration to the nymphs in *Idyll* 7.91–92. Another significant instance is at the end of Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*, where Apollo declares that he prefers the small, pure stream that comes from a sacred source, over the great stream of the Assyrian river, words, thus defending the small but refined poetry of Callimachus.³⁴ In the *action* of the

³² In Euripides’ *IA* 9–11, when the Greek fleet is hindered at Aulis by Artemis through the wind, Agamemnon declares that there is no clear sound of birds or the sea; the silence of the winds checks the progress of the Achaean army upon the Euripus (οὐκουν φθόγγος γ’ οὐτ’ ὀρνίθων / οὔτε θαλάσσης: σιγαί δ’ ἀνέμων / τόνδε κατ’ Εὐριπον ἔχουσιν). By referring to the lack of wind as ‘silence’, Euripides invites an association between wind and voice / poetry and lack of wind and interruption of poetic activity.

³³ Cf. Crowther 1979:1–11 for a study of water and wine as symbols of inspiration in Greek and Roman literature.

³⁴ Albis 1996:108.

Argonautica we are considering, the positive reaction of Rhea implies that the divine world is pleased with the new path of poetry and favors its progress. Rhea and Apollo contribute in different ways to the process of creation; the first one provides flow and inspiration; the second one inspires and also brings light (shows the paths), as we will see in our second *aetion*. The production by Rhea of a *locus amoenus*, a space that symbolizes safety and comfort, anticipates the success of the enterprise, both journey and poem. At the same time, Rhea's answer can be seen as a surrogate for the audience, who, as the goddess, is enchanted by the words and participates actively in the production of the poem. If the magic dance ordered by Orpheus and Orpheus' magic songs are representations of the poem, then the *Argonautica* is asking for a positive response from the audience to its music, magic and enchantment.³⁵

In conclusion, the *aetion* of Book 1.1132–1139 reveals the active role of the Argonauts in creating the plot of the *Argonautica*. The transformation of the pyrrhic in a magic dance reflects the unheroic themes that define the poem and shows the importance of music and magic as characteristics to this new type of epic. The positive reaction of Rhea indicates the approval of the Argonauts' actions by the divine world, and divine participation in the progress of the journey and the poem. Finally, the goddess' response also indicates the role expected from the audience who, just as the divinity, is invited to accompany the endeavors of the Argonauts with their active participation and creation of meaning.

2. *The aetion of Arg. 4.1719–1730*

The Argonauts are sailing in complete darkness when Jason prays to Apollo as the protector of the expedition to bring light. The god appears and reveals the island of Anaphe, where they stop. Here Apollonius introduces the ethnographical *aetion* of the *aeschrologia*. This *aetion* explains a custom of the people of Aegina but, at the same time, relates to the themes of the main narrative, since the women who vie in abuse with the Argonauts are Medea's maidens, who had been given to her by Queen Arete.³⁶ The Greek text reads:

Μηδείης δμῶαι Φαικίδες, οὐκέτ' ἔπειτα
ἴσχειν ἐν στήθεσσι γέλω σθένον, οἷα θαμειᾶς
αἰὲν ἐν Ἀλκινόοιο βροοκτασίας ὀρόωσαι.

³⁵ Schaaf 2014:36–97, 223–231 argues that Orpheus represents a positive verbal enchantment that corresponds to Medea's negative pharmacological magic. He shows how Apollonius relates Orpheus' magical and religious power and poetic skill with the literary 'charm' of the *Argonautica*.

³⁶ Valverde Sánchez 1989:182.

τὰς δ' αἰσχροῖς ἥρωες ἐπεστοβέεσκον ἔπεσσιν
 χλεύη γηθόσυνοι: γλυκερὴ δ' ἀνεδαίετο τοῖσιν
 κερτομίη καὶ νεῖκος ἐπεσβόλον. ἐκ δέ νυ κείνης
 μολπῆς ἠρώων νήσῳ ἔνι τοῖα γυναῖκες
 ἀνδράσι δηριόωνται, ὅτ' Ἀπόλλωνα θυηλαῖς
 Αἰγλήτην Ἀνάφης τιμήορον ἰλάσκωνται.

Then Medea's Phaeacian servants could no longer hold their laughter within their breast, having always seen such great sacrifices of cattle in the palace of Alcinous. The heroes, delighted with their jest, mocked them with shameful words and a sweet mockery and abusive strife were kindled. From this jesting of the heroes, the women still compete with the men in this way on the island whenever they appease Apollo, the Gleamer, guardian of Anaphe, with offerings. (Arg 4.1722–1730)

The events that happen are very unusual. Medea's maidens mock the fact that the heroes are making libations with water. It is the lack of resources which provokes the *aeschrologia* because the maidens are accustomed to the abundance of Alcinous' palace. Bremmer (2005:27–28) notes that mixed wine was the norm for Greek sacrifice, with water highly unusual; a similar, unusual situation occurs in Homer when the companions of Odysseus close the sacrifice of the oxen of the Sun with water instead of wine (*Od.* 12.362–363). The Anaphiote ritual is similarly strange, and so are the events that follow, when the sexual banter is started by the women and not the men. The episode, therefore, does not only explain a strange ritual that could have interested the Greeks because it was different from their rites, but it also underscores an important theme of the poem, namely, the strife between women and men. This is the main topic in the episode of Lemnos (*Arg.* 1.605–614), where women act like men: they work, take up arms, discuss political issues in an assembly, and, finally, decide to kill their men and sons. These women appear in serious opposition to their husbands who have neglected them for Thracian women. The *aeschrologia* of *Arg.* 4.1722–1730, which represents a shift from love to hatred between women and men, reappears later on in the relationship between Medea and Jason, a love-relation which we know will end in separation and hatred, an end suggested also in several parts by the comparison between Medea and Jason and Ariadne and Theseus (*Arg.* 3.997–1007). The sacrifice on Aegina overtly signals closure by replaying, in a lighter mode, the love-hatred theme from the Lemnian episode and from Book 3.

After leaving Crete, darkness surrounds the ship; the crew asks for Apollo's help, and Jason promises many sacrifices as a reward for his assistance (4.1690–1705). Phoebus appears, bringing shimmering light to illuminate the Argonauts'

path. The Argonauts then build an altar to him when they reach the island which they call Anaphe because it was there that Apollo had appeared (ἀνέφηνε, 4.1718) to them, and they call the god Αἰγλήτης because of the light (αἴγλη) he has given to them. Apollo brings light at a moment when the journey cannot continue. The illumination that Apollo grants is a symbol of the poetic clarity that the god provides at different points in the narrative.³⁷

To thank the god, the Argonauts choose to build an altar to Apollo and to honor him with libations. They are forced to use water since the conditions of the desert do not allow for more sophisticated offerings. The fact that the sacrifice is meager bears another important implication. In Apollonius' story, the big sacrifices of cattle that the Phaeacian girls are used to experiencing in Alcinous' palace, bring to mind the Homeric precedent in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, of the sacrifice to the cattle of the Sun made with libations of water due to the lack of wine. This is a sacrifice that does not appease the gods because of the deceptive intention with which it is offered. Inspired by this ominous model in which a sacrifice of cattle with libations of water did not propitiate the gods, the sacrifices of cattle in Alcinous' palace that Apollonius' narrator mentions, represent a path not to be taken. At the same time, important consequences can be drawn from this unfavorable model: the assistance of the gods does not depend on the weight of the sacrifice but on the intentions and piety of those making the offering.³⁸ Hitch (2009) reminds us that sacrifices reflect the customs and beliefs of those who perform them. In the *Argonautica* the decisions taken by the Argonauts are not excuses led by personal interests, but the reflection of the *ethos* that moves the participants. The Argonauts 'choose' to make this propitiatory sort of sacrifice, which is intended as a thank-offering for the light provided by Apollo. It has been pointed out that no thank-offerings are recorded in Homer, and that, for example, when Odysseus lands in Ithaca, after all his sufferings, he does not make thank-

³⁷ Before departing from Greece the Argonauts build an altar on the shore to Apollo, god of Embarkation, whose oracle had promised that he would guide the path and reveal the routes in the sea (*Arg.* 1.402–424). When he prays to Apollo, Jason asks the god for a kindly breeze and a calm sea (*Arg.* 1.411). When they disembark in the territory of Cyzicus, the Argonauts also set up an altar to Apollo on the shore and prepare a sacrifice (*Arg.* 1.961–988). The same happens when they reach the land of Chios (*Arg.* 1.1184–1186). In Book 2.694–719, Apollo appears to the Argonauts at the island of Thynias in the form of a young man and points out the way to them; the Argonauts call the land 'island of Apollo of the Dawn', make sacrifices and libations, and celebrate the god with dance and song.

³⁸ In *Memorabilia* 1.3.3, Xenophon declares that Socrates considered his humble sacrifices to be pleasing to the gods, since the gods gave more value to the piety of the giver than to the offering.

offerings for his safe return.³⁹ On the contrary, throughout the *Argonautica*, the Argonauts continually honor Apollo as helper of sailors and poets with these types of sacrifices that reveal a new aspect of the heroes: their gratitude.⁴⁰ The Argonauts offer what they have with sincerity, with no pretence or deceit. When the Argonauts are ready to leave the island, while untying the ropes, Apollo sends fair weather (ὕπεύδια ‘under a fair weather’, *Arg.* 4.1729), a specification that points to the value given by Apollo to the small sacrifice performed with genuine reverence by the Argonauts.⁴¹

The small sacrifice in a ritual for Apollo in this *aetion* also acquires a programmatic significance against Apollo’s injunctions in the *Aetia* prologue.⁴² At the beginning of Callimachus’ *Aetia* ‘prologue’, fr. 1.23–24, there is also a reference to sacrifice and poetic creation. Callimachus declares in those lines that Apollo requests him to raise the victim as fat as possible, but to keep the Muse slender (... αἰοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅτι πάχιστον / θρέψαι, τὴν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην·). This has been thought to express an anti-epic position.⁴³ Critics have also suggested that the *Aetia* ‘prologue’ is primarily engaging a discussion about elegy.⁴⁴ In any case, Callimachus’ poetic principle is that poetry must be judged by its art, not by its extension. It is expressed in a series of oppositions in *Aetia* 1.13–18, immediately followed by the poet’s mention of Apollo’s guidelines: to follow the untrodden path, to avoid the common routes, and to make the victim

³⁹ Hewitt 1912:98–99; Hitch 2009.

⁴⁰ Powell 2014:31 refers to the powers of the priests in the *Iliad* and points out that ‘in his prayer to Apollo to destroy the offending Greeks, Chryses appeals to the religious principle “I give that you may give” (Latin *do ut des*). He burned thigh-pieces to the god and roofed his shrine. Therefore Apollo owes him and should send plague to the Greek camp’.

⁴¹ On the piety of the Argonauts, see Hunter 1993:75–100; Mori 2008b:140–186.

⁴² Heerink 2015:31 recognizes a clear intertextual relationship between the passages dealing with Apollo in Callimachus’ poetry and in the *Argonautica*, and refers to the problems relating to the chronology of the three major Hellenistic poets (Callimachus, Apollonius, and Theocritus). He accepts ‘the productive hypothesis that these poets, working in the museum, were quite aware of and could allude to each other’s work in progress’. I follow this line of thought and on this basis I take Apollonius to rework Apollo’s works in the *Aetia* prologue. Cf. Köhnken 2001:73–92 and Harder 2012.1:4 on the chronology of these Hellenistic poets.

⁴³ Cf. Heerink 2015:10, referring to specifically the prologue to the *Aetia*, the *Hymn to Apollo*, and *Epigram* 28 Pf. According to Heerink, Callimachus does not target Homer, but rather neo-‘Homeric’ poetry, the ‘cyclic poem’ (τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν) in particular.

⁴⁴ Cameron 1995:303–338 claims that the prologue engages in a discussion not about epic, but about the style of elegiac poetry; Rawles 2019:31 argues that Callimachus in the prologue defends short elegies over long ones; Morrison 2007:182 argues that the prologue speaks about elegy, but ‘that elegy is the *Aetia*’.

fat but poetry slender (*Aetia* 1.23–28). If in this prologue, the fat victim aligns with the trodden and wide path, and if this new series of oppositions is in correspondence with the previous ones presented by the poet in lines 13–18, then the fat victim would likely refer to Homeric poetry or epic.⁴⁵ In the *action* of the *aeschrologia* at Aegina, Apollonius seems to establish a connection between sacrifice and poetry, just as Callimachus did, but now the sacrifice is meager, and also the words that this sacrifice provokes. Considered in the light of the *Aetia* prologue, the sacrifices of cattle mentioned by Apollonius' narrator correspond, therefore, to the epic poetry that is to be avoided, and the meager sacrifice offered by the Argonauts aligns with the Callimachean ideal of delicacy and thinness.⁴⁶

The exchange of words that occurs between the Argonauts and the Phaeacian women in the episode is named with the term *μολπή* (*Arg.* 4.1728), a term Hellenistic poets used with different meanings ranging from lyric poetry to music.⁴⁷ Phillips (2020:189–190) points out that Apollonius' paradoxical language in the passage (*γλυκερή ... κερτομῆ καὶ νεῖκος ἐπεσβόλον*) indicates the 'strife' as not serious, and that the *κερτομῆ* is experienced as 'sweet' by both the girls and the Argonauts because they are aware of this non-seriousness, and that they participate in the actions 'at a slight angle'. In this episode, the innocent strife is seen through the lens of the narrator who considers the interchange 'sweet' and refers to it with the term *μολπή*. The innocent responses of Medea's maidens and the Argonauts acquire then, through the eyes of the narrator, a metapoetic meaning as a commentary on the type of poetry that includes these types of exchanges. It is worth noting that the term has been employed to refer to dance and music in

⁴⁵ Cf. Stephens 2018.

⁴⁶ Heerink 2015:42 points out that the pine that Heracles finds in *Arg.* 1190–1193 alludes to the poplar that Erisichton strikes in Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*, which has been interpreted as representing Callimachus' poetics of *λεπτότης*. According to him, the term *πάχος* ('thickness') employed by Apollonius to describe the similitudes between the pine and the poplar, which was like a shoot of poplar in length and thickness, alludes to the *Aetia* prologue where Callimachus employs the term *πάχιστον* ('as thick as possible'). Heerink states that Apollonius 'seems to adhere to Aristotle's poetics but also to those of Callimachus', and points out that the two of them (Aristotle and Callimachus) seem to agree on the proper length of a narrative poem (Aristotle defends the length of a group of tragedies offered together (*Poet.* 24.1459b) and Callimachus' *Aetia* was originally about five thousand lines). As Heerink points out, 'with his remark on the length of the pine tree, Apollonius expresses his allegiance to Aristotle about the proper length of an epic, but this is not incompatible with Callimachus' own poetics, as the *Aetia* shows'. Hunter 2008:135 argues that, even if the *Argonautica* tells a continuous story, the commentaries made by the self-conscious narrator, who shows awareness that 'all narration is a process of selectivity' is an 'ironic acknowledgement of the impossibility of "completeness"'.
⁴⁷ Massimilla 2017.

worship in other parts of the *Argonautica*. Massimilla (2017:412–413) points out, for example, that ‘after the god’s epiphany on the island of Thynias they [the Argonauts] form a chorus around the altar they have built to him, and “sing of Apollo Hie Paieon” (2.702f. καλὸν Ἱηπαιῦον Ἱηπαιῦονα Φοῖβον / μελπόμενοι)’. He then mentions that ‘ritual abuse in Apollo’s worship on the island of Anaphe commemorates the playful exchange (4.1728 μολπῆς) between the Argonauts and Medea’s maidservants, which took place while the heroes were performing a makeshift sacrifice to Apollo’. Finally, he notes that ‘Apollonius’ Argonauts also sing in worship of Rhea on Mount Dindymon (1.1151 μέλποντες)’. Massimilla also explores the use of the terms μέλος and μολπή in connection with Orpheus’ musical activity.⁴⁸

In conclusion, Apollonius in his *Argonautica* takes inspiration from Homer but creates a Callimachean epic, in which unheroic and light themes acquire relevance.⁴⁹ In the episode we have just studied, the Callimachean allegiance of the poem is represented by the water the Argonauts sacrifice to Apollo. The interchange between Medea’s maidens and the Argonauts, which is commented on by the narrator by means of the use of the terms μολπή and γλυκερή, serves also as a commentary on Apollonius’ poem and its Callimachean principles.

3. *The action of Arg. 4.1766–1772*

The *action* of the *hydrophoria* at Aegina is placed at the end of the journey of the Argonauts. The Argonauts stop on the island of Aegina to carry water to their ships and this practical necessity gives rise to a playful contest. The Greek text reads:

κεῖθεν δ’ ἀπτερέως διὰ μυρίον οἶδμα λιπόντες
 Αἰγίνης ἀκτῆσιν ἐπέσχεθον: αἶψα δὲ τοίγε
 ὑδρείης πέρι δῆριν ἀμεμφέα δηρίσαντο,
 ὅς κεν ἀφυσσάμενος φθαίη μετὰ νῆαδ’ ἰκέσθαι.
 ἄμφθ γὰρ χρεῖώ τε καὶ ἄσπετος οὔρος ἔπειγεν.
 ἔνθ’ ἔτι νῦν πλήθοντας ἐπωμαδὸν ἀμφιφορήας
 ἀνθέμενοι κούφοισιν ἄφαρ κατ’ ἀγῶνα πόδεσσιν
 κοῦροι Μυρμιδόνων νίκης πέρι δηριόωνται.

⁴⁸ See Massimilla 2017:415.

⁴⁹ DeForest 1994:34 argues that Apollonius’ characters want to take part in a Homeric epic that the Callimachean narrator refuses to write, and points out that ‘along with establishing love as a Callimachean theme, the poet identifies certain moral choices and characteristics as Callimachean seduction, treachery, and cowardice. The real Callimachus may well have resented these qualities being imputed to him’.

From there they swiftly, having cut through the vast sea, stopped at the shores of Aegina. Immediately they engaged in an innocent contest about the drawing of water, to see who could return to the ship first after drawing water. For both need and an unspeakably fair wind were urging them. From this, still now the sons of the Myrmidons, having put full amphoras on their shoulders compete with light feet for victory in the games.

(*Arg.* 4.1765–1772)

Valverde Sánchez points out that this tale is narrated concisely because the Argonauts made a short stop to provide the ships with water and the story is approaching its end, and the brevity and conciseness correspond to the motivation of the *aetion* as a race.⁵⁰ But this *aetion* has another important function as well. The Argonauts establish the contest for the water due to necessity. It is the lack of water that motivates it. In other words, it has a practical function. It is not a heroic contest in which the heroes can display their skills but a simple and servile competition. In Book 1.1153 the Argonauts vie in rowing, also moved by a practical need. It is worth noting that it is an incredibly favorable wind that incites the contest, just as in the first *aetion* examined in this article strong winds provoke the necessity of the armed dance. This passage again seems to activate the connection between wind and poetic inspiration, as well as a connection with Apollo. Callimachus' *Iamb.* 8, which also presents the contest of the *hydrophoria*,⁵¹ concerns a festival at Aegina, which, as Albis points out, the reader can assume is in honor of Apollo since he is the benefactor of sailors.⁵² We can assume that in Apollonius' poem the contest is intended to honor Apollo too, since this *aetion* gives rise to a festival that was later celebrated by the sons of the Myrmidons, presumably in honor of Apollo.⁵³ Critics have underlined that the *Argonautica* begins and ends with Apollo.⁵⁴ Albis points out the ring composition: 'The Argonauts begin and complete their long voyage with rites in honor of Apollo in his aspect as a patron of seafarers. At the same time, Apollonius' poem begins and ends with homage paid to the divine inspirer of his poetry, who is the same deity'.⁵⁵

The Argonauts hurry because they need water and because they want to take advantage of the favorable wind, and the fast speed of the Argonauts mirrors the fast pace of the ending of the poem as a whole. The adjective that describes

⁵⁰ Valverde Sánchez 1989:269.

⁵¹ Cf. Cameron 1995:251–253 about the content of Callimachus *Iamb.* 8, its relationship with Apollonius' *aetion* and the interpretation of its position at the end of the *Argonautica* as an homage paid to Callimachus.

⁵² Albis 1996:47.

⁵³ Cf. Pindar, *Nemean* 5.44, about Aegina's festival belonging to Apollo.

⁵⁴ Albis 1996:46; Thalmann 2011:30.

⁵⁵ Albis 1996:46.

this contest is ἀμεμφής (*Arg.* 4.1767), which means ‘blameless’, ‘innocent’. The contest is presented as an improvised activity demanded by necessity and playful in purpose. This game, then, replays themes from the *Iliad* (the funeral games for Patroclus in Book 23), but in a lighter vein, thus offering another case of Apollonius’ Callimachean rebranding of the epic tradition. In addition, as an action presumably performed in honor of Apollo, the *aetion* also mirrors the program and goal of the whole poem which is inspired by Apollo and written in his honor.⁵⁶

Conclusions

The three *aetia* studied in this article not only point to a connection between a heroic past and the Ptolemaic present; they are also indicators of the author’s poetic values. In the first *aetion*, the magic dance reflects the characters’ active, self-conscious role in the development of the poem, as well as the poem’s magical power and musical quality that we have also seen in Orpheus’ song. In the second *aetion*, the meager sacrifice offered to Apollo by the Argonauts and the trivial jesting between Medea’s girls and Argonauts invite reflections on the relationship between sacrifice, poetics, and divine favor. As a reworking of the prologue of Callimachus’ *Aetia*, in which Apollo asks the poet to raise the victim as fat as possible but to keep his poetry delicate (fr. 1.23–24), Apollonius presents a god that accepts a simple libation of water, thus suggesting that a small action performed by a non-heroic group is welcomed by the god, and so also the poems that arise from their actions. Finally, the third *aetion* in which the Argonauts engage in a playful contest of carrying water reflects the light tone and fast pace at the end of the *Argonautica*.

In these three *aetia*, the Argonauts perform sacrifices that elicit positive answers from the gods. In this way, they reveal the significance of the divine participation in the progress of the journey and the poem, but, most importantly, they show the necessity of propitiating and giving thanks to the gods. The favour of the gods is expressed via elements of the natural world that have symbolic meanings. These are wind as inspiration, water as poetic fluidity, and light as poetic clarity. Wind prevents the progress of the expedition in the first *aetion*, but it

⁵⁶ For Cuypers 2004:44, Apollo is the cause of the poem and the model of the main hero Jason. Hunter 1996:46 states: ‘[...] the *Argonautica* of Apollonius is framed as a “Hymn to the Argonauts”, that is, a hymn on the traditional “Homeric” model in which the central mythic narrative has been greatly extended, but in which the hymnic frame remains’. Klooster 2011:88 rather than considering the *Argonautica* as a long hymnic poem, argues that ‘the incorporation of hymnic elements indicates that Apollonius wanted closely to relate his own epic song to the songs of Orpheus, which, as we have seen, are predominantly hymn-like and often related to the worship of Apollo’.

favors the journey in the third *aetion*, thus appearing as a symbol of the poet's block or inspiration.

The three *aetia* studied in this article mirror, therefore, the poem and introduce metapoetic comments on important aspects of Apollonius' poetics. By concluding the narrative with two *aetia*, the *Argonautica* appears as a poem that undergoes a process of detachment from the Homeric models towards a Callimachean identity.

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