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VALERIUS' FLAVIAN *ARGONAUTICA*

'[Valerius'] *Argonautica* is a story of high adventure, not a *poème à thèse*': so stated Garson in 1965.[1] Strand later added that the essential nature of this poem and the choice of subject-matter was determined by poetic inability; he describes the prooemium to Valerius' *Argonautica* as 'a *recusatio*: the theme of the fall of Jerusalem is beyond his powers, and it would instead be treated by Domitian who was fit for such an arduous task; Valerius had to content himself with the theme of an old myth'.[2] It is these two opinions that I wish to question in this article. Indeed, alarm bells immediately sound at Strand's interpretation of the poet's *recusatio*. It has long been recognized that the original Callimachean *recusatio* was twisted by the Augustan poets. Gordon Williams analyses their practice thus: 'They sadly regret that their poor talents will not rise to great subjects – and the subjects to which they will not rise are not the old mythological tales but the great affairs of contemporary Roman history and, in particular, the deeds of Augustus. It is clear, however, that they are using this form of poem to enumerate and praise the great deeds of Augustus, under the guise of proposing their own inability.'[3] No-one hesitates to agree that Valerius was well versed in the Augustan poets.[4] It is dangerous, therefore, to assume without question that he was deceived by their insincerity. There is in fact good reason to examine the alternative possibility, namely that Valerius understood well the practice of his literary predecessors, that he dared to tread in their footsteps and that he succeeded in the supreme duty of a poet, that is to say, the business of ensuring that *ars celavit artem*.

The text of the prooemium[5]

Prima deum magnis canimus freta pervia natis
fatidicamque ratem, Scythici quae Phasidis oras
ausa sequi mediosque inter iuga concita cursus
rumpere flammifero tandem consedit Olympo.
Phoebe, mone, si Cumaeae mihi conscia vatis
stat casta cortina domo, si laurea digna
fronte viret, tuque o pelagi cui maior aperti
fama, Caledonius postquam tua carbasa vexit
Oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos,
eripe me populis et habenti nubila terrae,
sancte pater, veterumque fave veneranda canenti
facta virum: versam proles tua pandit Idumen,
namque potest, Solymo nigrantem pulvere fratrem
spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem.
ille tibi cultusque deum delubraque genti

[1] R. W. Garson, 'Observations on Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* II', *CQ* 15 (1965), 114.
[2] J. Strand, *Notes on Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica* (Gothenburg, 1972), p. 37.
[3] G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 46–7.
[4] Cf., e.g., W. C. Summers, *A Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus* (Cambridge, 1894), pp. 26–33, 37–9; P. Hardie, 'Flavian Epicists on Virgil's Epic Technique', *Ramus* 18 (1989), 5–9.
[5] The text provided is my own. The sources recorded in the *apparatus* are taken from C. Giarratano, *C. Valerii Flacci Balbi Setini Argonauticon Libri Octo* (Naples/Milan, 1904), ad loc. and W.-W. Ehlers, *Gai Valeri Flacci Setini Balbi Argonauticon Libri Octo* (Stuttgart, 1980), ad loc. The sigla used conform with those used by Ehlers, ibid., pp. vi–xv.

instituet, cum iam, genitor, lucebis ab omni
parte poli: neque enim Tyriis Cynosura carinis
certior aut Grais Helice servanda magistris.
seu tu signa dabis seu te duce Graecia mittet
et Sidon Nilusque rates: nunc nostra serenus
orsa iuves, haec ut Latias vox impleat urbes.

1 natis N *V–1523*: nautis ω *vide Strand*[6] 10 habenti *B–1474*: habent ω 13 potest X^{c}T: potes ω 16 iam L: tu S: *om.* V 17 neque enim Tyriis ... carinis *Friesemann, Declerq, Thilo*: neque in Tyrias ... carinas ω *vide Strand*[7]

I sing of the first straits allowing passage to the great sons of the gods and of the prophetic ship, which daring to make for the shores of the Scythian Phasis and to force its way through the midst of the Clashing Rocks at last settled in the fiery firmament. Apollo, advise me, if in my chaste house there stands a tripod privy to the secrets of the Cumaean prophetess, if a green laurel-wreath adorns a worthy brow. And you, to whom belongs greater glory for opening up the sea, after the Caledonian Ocean, which earlier had despised the Phrygian Iuli, bore your sails, raise me up from the peoples of the world and the cloud-laden earth, sacred father, and sponsor one singing the venerable deeds of ancient heroes: your son tells of the overthrow of Idume, for he is able, and of his brother begrimed with the dust of Jerusalem, scattering firebrands and causing havoc in every turret. He will institute divine cults in your honour and temples in honour of your *gens*, when soon, father, you will shine from every quarter of the sky: for neither will the Little Bear be a surer guide for Tyrian ships, nor the Great Bear which must be watched by Greek helmsmen. Whether in the future you will give signs, whether under your guidance Greece and Sidon and the Nile will send out ships, at this present time look kindly upon my undertakings and assist them, so that my voice may fill the cities of Latium.'

The text of the prooemium printed follows (fairly conservatively) that transmitted by the manuscripts, except where indicated in the *apparatus* provided. I share Strand's opinion that Getty's substitution of *alenti*[8] and Robertson's substitution of *aventi*[9] for *habenti* (1.10) are quite unnecessary.[10] Likewise, I believe that *genti* must be retained in line 15 against Heinsius' emendation *gentis* and Haupt's emendation *centum*, both for the reasons given by Strand[11] and for the reasons given below.[12] Ehlers adequately defends *seu ... seu*, the transmitted text in line 19, against any form of alteration.[13] Other conjectures offered in this passage have rightly received little recognition.[14]

The historical context

In an introduction to an article discussing the problem of dating the *Argonautica*, Syme[15] declared 'Where the man survived to complete and edit his work, such a dedication, the last thing to be written, more or less bears on its face the date of publication.' With Valerius Flaccus, as Syme acknowledges, the situation must be somewhat different. Modern scholars are more or less unanimous in the belief that the poem was never completed but was cut short by the poet's premature death: this is almost certainly the import of Quintilian's brief obituary notice, *multum in Valerio Flacco nuper amisimus* (*Inst. Orat.* 10.1.90).[16] Most scholars, therefore, have come to

[6] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 7–9. [7] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 17–19.
[8] R. J. Getty, 'The Introduction to the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus', *CPh* 35 (1940), 264–7; cf. also A. Y. Campbell, 'The Background of Valerius Flaccus, 1.10', *CR* 55 (1941), 25–27. [9] D. S. Robertson, 'Valerius Flaccus 1.10'. *CR* 55 (1941), 27.
[10] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 9–12. [11] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 16–17.
[12] See pp. 215–6.
[13] Ehlers, 'Valerius Flaccus 1940 bis 1971', *Lustrum* 16 (1971–2), 115.
[14] These emendations have been offered by, amongst others, Getty, art. cit. (n. 8), 259–73; J. H. Waszink, 'Valerius Flaccus 1.13', *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971), 297–9; J. Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 7–22. [15] R. Syme, 'The *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus', *CQ* 23 (1929), 129.
[16] Cf. also H. M. Poortvliet, 'Valerius and the Last File' in M. Korn and H. J. Tschiedel (edd.), *Ratis omnia vincet* (Hildesheim, 1991), pp. 35–43.

the natural and, in my opinion, correct conclusion that the prooemium of the *Argonautica* is an integral part of the first book and that any interpretation of the datable material within it will lead not to the date of publication but to an early date within the period of composition.[17]

Scholars who have discussed the datable material in this prooemium have reached no general consensus:[18] some argue that it was written under Domitian, others under Titus and yet others under Vespasian. Each theory entails its own particular interpretation of *ille tibi cultusque deum delubraque genti/instituet* (15–16). In this statement *tibi* clearly refers to Vespasian, but by *ille* does Valerius mean his elder son Titus or his younger son Domitian? To what do(es) the *delubraque genti* refer?

Adopting Heinsius' emendation of *genti* to *gentis*, Syme interprets *delubraque gentis* as 'an unmistakable reference to the *Templum Flaviae Gentis*',[19] a temple which was built in A.D. 94–5 by Domitian (*ille*).[20] Terwogt, Getty and Smallwood[21] hold to the belief that the temple to which *delubraque genti* refers is the *Templum Divi Vespasiani*, whose construction Titus (*ille*) began in A.D. 80 and Domitian later completed under the new title of *templum Vespasiani et Titi*.[22] Lefèvre argues that *delubraque genti* (v. 15) is a metaphor for a poem to be written by Domitian (*ille*) on Vespasian's achievements, following the precedent of a similar metaphor in the prooemium of Virgil's third *Georgic* (3.12ff.);[23] he therefore concludes that the prooemium was written A.D. 70–74, the period at which Domitian began his poetic activity. Strand cites Wistrand's opinion that 'Es ist schliesslich auch möglich, dass der Dichter überhaupt nicht an einen bestimmten, schon bestehenden oder projektierten Tempel dachte, sondern nur voraussah—was wirklich nicht schwer vorauszusehen war—dass

[17] Two dissenting voices have challenged this *communis opinio* in recent times. Syme (art. cit. (n. 15), 135) states that lines 5–21 are 'a palpable insertion', added at the time when the poet came to publish or recite a part of his work. Ehlers has recently advanced the hypothesis that lines 5–21 of the prooemium are no more than an extension of the original prooemium (lines 1–4), which 'zudem in seinem Umfang dem Prooemium des Apollonios genau entspricht'. He believes that this extension was prompted by the death of Vespasian (Ehlers, in Korn and Tschiedel (edd.), op. cit., p. 22). Ehlers' hypothesis is inextricably linked with his opinion, in my view erroneous, that 'das Epos unabhängig von Vespasians Eroberung der Kaledonischen Ozeans konzipiert worden ist, das heisst, gar nicht im Blick auf Vespasian und seine Familie verfasst wurde'. Cf. below, pp. 217ff.

[18] Useful synopses of the various conclusions reached by scholars on this matter are provided by G. Cambier, 'Recherches chronologiques sur l'oeuvre et la vie de Valerius Flaccus' in J. Bibauw (ed.), *Hommages à Marcel Renard, Collection Latomus 101* (Brussels, 1969), pp. 191–228 and M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism I* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 502–5. Cf. also E. Lefèvre, 'Das Prooemium der Argonautica des Valerius Flaccus', *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz* 6 (Wiesbaden, 1971); H. Bardon, *REA* 74 (1972), 305; E. Wistrand, *Gnomon* 45 (1973), 497–8; Ehlers, in Korn and Tschiedel (edd.), op. cit. (n. 16), pp. 19–22.

[19] Syme, art. cit. (n. 15), 136.

[20] For a description of this temple see S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1929), p. 247. I have accepted here the date of construction as given by K. Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (Stuttgart, 1936), p. 66.

[21] W. Meerum Terwogt, *Quaestiones Valerianae* (Diss. Amsterdam, 1898) (I have not had access to this work); Getty, 'The Date of the Composition of the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus', *CPh* 31 (1936), 53–61; E. M. Smallwood, 'Valerius Flaccus *Argonautica* 1. 5–21', *Mnemosyne* 15 (1962), 170–2.

[22] I have taken the date at which construction work on the *templum Vespasiani* began from Getty, art. cit. (n. 21), 56. A description of this temple is given by Platner and Ashby, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 556 and E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome* II (Tübingen, 1962), pp. 501–4.

[23] Lefèvre, art. cit. (n. 18), 29ff. Against this theory, Ehlers rightly comments (art. cit. (n. 13), 116) that 'Zu einer doch mit erheblichen Schwierigkeiten verbundenen Deutung, wie L[efèvre] sie vorbringt, sollte man m.E. erst Zuflucht nehmen, wenn alle konkreten Lösungsmöglichkeiten erschöpft sind'.

die dynastiebewussten Flavier dieselben Ehren wie die Julier beanspruchen würden'.[24] In Wistrand's opinion, then, *delubraque genti may* not allude to a specific construction and does not, therefore, provide a specific dating tool. From the perspective of modern literary criticism, this argument is obviously the least convenient; it is, however, by far the most judicious: it avoids interpreting *delubraque genti* in isolation from its context and does not impose prejudicial conclusions upon the rest of the prooemium.

The rest of the prooemium in fact suggests an earlier rather than later date of composition. Ehlers observes[25] that Valerius 'vivum ut videtur Vespasianum allocutum esse et Titum nondum principem, Domitianum poetam tantum appellasse': the future tense in *lucebis* (line 16) clearly implies that Vespasian, the subject of this verb, is not yet deified and therefore not yet dead. Ehlers remarks further that 'Insgesamt legt die Gewichtung der Flavier im Prooemium (in Antiklimax Vespasian, Titus, Domitian) die Wahrscheinlichkeit sehr nahe, dass Domitian jedenfalls noch nicht regiert'.[26] Similarly, Strand notes that, despite the reference to Titus' military glory in lines 12–14, in lines 15–16 the emphasis returns to Vespasian's future glory.[27] Finally, Strand points out that for Valerius to dedicate his *Argonautica* to Vespasian at a time when either Titus or Domitian was sovereign would be an 'enigmatic and unnatural act... unique in Roman literature'.[28]

The prooemium, then, provides strong evidence of its composition during the principate of Vespasian. In this context, Wistrand's argument that *delubraque genti* do not allude to a specific construction built or planned has added force. The undefined plurality of the noun may be seen as an integral part of the poet's flattery of Vespasian. It would be difficult to overestimate the extent to which Valerius would gratify Vespasian by declaring to him prophetically and with all certainty that Titus[29] 'will institute divine cults in your honour and temples in honour of your *gens*' (15–16). With the choice of the verb *instituet* Valerius implies that Vespasian's son will at one and the same time establish a cult and temple specifically in honour of Vespasian and in these acts set a precedent for future successors to the Flavian throne. This nuance of meaning conforms with Vespasian's well-attested obsession with the dynastic dimension of his rule. Right at the outset of his rule, Vespasian, following in the footsteps of Augustus, publicized his confidence that his rule was the beginning of a dynasty, a dynasty that would dispel the prospect of future civil wars in the struggle for imperial succession and that would consequently ensure continued peace for the Roman Empire.[30] Coins were minted at the beginning of his reign depicting both his sons, Titus and Domitian, in a fashion that symbolized their future succession to the throne.[31] In the context of this obsession with dynastic succession, Valerius' reference to unspecified, unnumbered *delubra genti* as a future certainty was

[24] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 32.

[25] Ehlers, op. cit. (n. 5), p.v. For Ehlers' current theory regarding the dating of the prooemium, see above, n. 17.

[26] Ehlers, art. cit. (n. 13), 116. Against Syme's argument (art. cit. (n. 15), 130–3) that Valerius' allusion to Sarmatian military tactics and weapons was suggested by Domitian's Danube Wars (A.D. 89 and 92), see E. Wistrand, *Die Chronologie der Punica des Silius Italicus* (Gothenburg, 1956), p. 17 n. 2.

[27] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 29–30.

[28] Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 31.

[29] The assumption that Titus would succeed his father and perform these services was only logical from Valerius' perspective. Getty (art. cit. (n. 21), 54–5) provides parallel examples wherein *ille* represents 'not the principal subject, but, on the contrary, either the object, or a noun in an oblique case, or a subordinate subject in the preceding clause'. Cf. also Strand, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 26.

[30] Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), pp. 22ff.

[31] Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), pp. 23–4. Note that Titus had no male offspring.

a calculated and no doubt effective means of ingratiating himself with Vespasian. With the phrase *delubra genti*, moreover, Valerius is in effect making a complimentary, qualitative statement about the character of Vespasian and future Flavian emperors, for the phrase assumes the apotheosis of the successive emperors, a concept that at this period was commonly viewed as the reward of a virtuous life.[32]

There are strong reasons to believe, therefore, that the prooemium of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* was written under the principate of Vespasian but with a deliberate emphasis on the continuance of the Flavian dynasty in the person of Titus and possibly also Domitian.

The literary significance of the Prooemium

The first four lines of the *Argonautica* are of considerable importance: they present the poet's own summary of his poem and offer us an authoritative and unique insight into the way in which the poet himself viewed his subject-matter. It is surprising, therefore, that they have been badly neglected. Ehlers[33] alone has noted that in the prooemium two *consecrationes* are mentioned, the first that of Argo (1–4) and the second that of Vespasian (15–18). He notes also that both Argo and Vespasian are described as conquerors of the sea. These two points of correlation lead Ehlers to suspect that 'das Epos nicht nur die Argo zum Thema hat, sondern auch die Legitimierung des flavischen Hauses durch eine Leistung, durch die sie den götterentsprossenen Juliern überlegen ist'.[34] This suspicion is well founded. Further points of correlation between the summary and the dedication of the poem can now be revealed. After stating his *theme* ('Prima deum magnis canimus freta pervia natis/ fatidicamque ratem', 1.1–2), Valerius mentions the destination or *purpose* of the voyage ('Scythici quae Phasidis oras/ ausa sequi', 2–3), one significant *incident* ('mediosque inter iuga concita cursus rumpere', 3–4) and the *end* of the voyage ('flammifero tandem consedit Olympo', 4). The *theme* stated in the first two lines of the epic was traditionally understood to mark the end of an era: the voyage of Argo signalled the end of the Golden Age. Likewise, the invocation and dedication marks the beginning of a new era: the Julio-Claudian dynasty had now given way to the Flavian dynasty. In his summary of the *purpose* of the voyage, Valerius conspicuously omits any mention of the golden fleece. Compare, on the other hand, Apollonius' summary of his *Argonautica*:

> Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν
> μνήσομαι, οἳ Πόντοιο κατὰ στόμα καὶ διὰ πέτρας
> Κυανέας βασιλῆος ἐφημοσύνῃ Πελίαο
> χρύσειον μετὰ κῶας ἐύζυγον ἤλασαν Ἀργώ. (Ap. Rhod. 1.1–4)

Beginning with you, Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the command of King Pelias, propelled Argo of the fine thwarts through the mouth of the Pontus and the Clashing Rocks in quest of the golden fleece.[35]

By contrast, Valerius' presentation of the purpose of the voyage emphasises the expansion of navigational frontiers.[36] In this respect he makes his summary correlate

[32] Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 39; G. K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme* (Oxford, 1972), p. 140.
[33] Ehlers, art. cit. (n. 13), 115–16.
[34] Ehlers, art. cit. (n. 13), 115. Ehlers later renounced this theory: (see above, n. 17).
[35] I have printed here the text of F. Vian published in F. Vian and É. Delage (edd.), *Apollonios de Rhodes Argonautiques* Tom. I (Paris, 1974). The translation is my own.
[36] I. R. McDonald (*The Flavian Epic Poets as Political and Social Critics* (Diss. Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 57) notes that in Jason's exhortation to his men before the voyage little emphasis is placed on the fleece again.

with 'Caledonius postquam tua carbasa vexit/Oceanus' (8–9), a reference to Vespasian's navigational achievements in the British campaign of Aulus Plautius during the principate of Claudius.[37] In his selection of an *incident*, Valerius follows Apollonius: both authors refer to the episode of the Clashing Rocks (1.3–4 and 1.2–3 respectively). Let us be careful, however, not to attribute this parallel with the Apollonian summary to slavish imitation. The omission of any mention of the golden fleece in favour of an expression of the expansion of navigational frontiers is clear evidence that Valerius was moulding the summary to his own design. It is by design, indeed, that Valerius passes over many other incidents of the voyage—for example, the war with the Scythians, Jason's love affair with Medea, his battle with the fire-breathing bulls and with the warriors sown from the Cadmean dragon's teeth. In choosing to mention the passage of the Argo through the Clashing Rocks, Valerius has selected an incident that symbolised the opening up of a hitherto inaccessible region:

> tum freta, quae longis fuerant impervia saeclis,
> ad subitam stupuere ratem Pontique iacentis
> omne solum regesque patent gentesque repostae. (4.711–13)

By design, then, this incident correlates directly with the reference to Vespasian's 'pelagi... maior aperti/fama' (7–8). To what extent Vespasian actually merited this fame is not important: flattery is the common property of dedicatory verse. In his presentation of the *end* of the voyage, Valerius again departs from Apollonius. Significantly, the καταστερισμός of Argo, as Ehlers indicates, correlates with the similar reference to Vespasian's future apotheosis (15–21).

This deliberate correlation between the summary and the dedication of the *Argonautica* betrays a purpose. Ehlers concluded that the purpose of the correlation was to indicate that 'Argonautarum facta cum factis Vespasiani comparantur'.[38] He admits to failure, however, in his search for such a comparison within the body of the epic.[39] This failure suggests some inaccuracy within his conclusion, an inaccuracy which in my opinion lies in the word 'comparantur'. The act of comparison implies the existence of appropriate points of comparison. These, however, we will struggle to find in many areas of the epic, when, for example, Jason takes on the fire-breathing bulls and fights the earth-born warriors. Indeed, instead of suggesting a strict comparison, I believe that Valerius wishes to reveal that there is a *symbolic* connection between the voyage of the Argo and the régime of Vespasian, and a *typological* connection between his mythological characters and certain historical and contemporary figures. Both symbolism and typology can exist on various levels; they do not require an analogy to be sustained to the same level of exactitude as comparison nor do they present a superficial and simplistic parallelism between one event or person and another.[40] A precedent for such symbolism and typology in the context of epic poetry is provided by Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this epic, cosmological phenomena,

[37] Valerius clearly intends to flatter Vespasian by the exaggeration 'Caledonius'. A. Momigliano ('*Panegyricus Messallae* and "Panegyricus Vespasiani"', *JRS* 40 [1950], 41–2) cites this prooemium and passages from Silius Italicus and Josephus as evidence that '"Caledonius" was used loosely or at least irresponsibly in the first century A.D.' and that in Flavian sources it does not 'allude distinctly and truthfully in every instance to the territory north of the Forth-Clyde line'.

[38] Ehlers, op. cit. (n. 5), p. v.

[39] Ehlers in Korn and Tschiedel (edd.), op. cit. (n. 16), p. 22.

[40] Cf., e.g. V. Pöschl, 'Basic Themes' in S. Commager (ed.), *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966), pp. 171–2; G. Binder, *Aeneas und Augustus: Interpretationen zum 8. Buch der Aeneis* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1971), pp. 2–3.

material items and mythological events often have symbolic value relevant to contemporary life in Rome;[41] Virgil's characters frequently appear as mythological types of contemporary figures; Aeneas, for example, may often be understood as a type of Augustus.[42] It is to such symbolism and typology, I believe, that Valerius is drawing our attention by his correlation of the summary with the dedication. Similar symbolism in fact may also be found in Statius's *Thebaid*: Ahl observes that 'Statius' decision to treat civil war through the ancient tale of the sons of Oedipus is in itself an expression of what he felt about the nature of internal struggles for power within the state and, in its own way, a powerful commentary on the wars of 68–9';[43] similarities, moreover, exist between the character and circumstances of Eteocles and Domitian.[44] An essential part of Statius' imitation of Virgil, therefore, seems to lie in the treatment of a contemporary theme in the guise of an ancient mythological tale. Hardie discusses the significance of Flavian epicists' imitation of Virgil as an indication of Flavian reading of the *Aeneid*.[45] Statius, then, provides evidence of Flavian recognition of the symbolic undercurrent beneath Virgil's narrative. Virgil's influence on Valerius was, of course, considerable.[46] Influence inspires emulation and for emulation the circumstances of Valerius' time were somewhat opportune. Virgil had enjoyed a special relationship with Augustus by his validation and glorification of the emperor's new régime, a régime that promised peace after many turbulent years.[47] Valerius found himself in the position to offer the same service in similar circumstances to the founder of a new dynasty, i.e. Vespasian. In presenting the voyage of Argo in a manner symbolic of the régime of Vespasian, therefore, Valerius was exploiting the contemporary political situation in a manner suggested to him by the precedent of the *Aeneid*.

If, then, as we deduce from the correlation of the summary and the dedication, the poet intends to present the *Argonautica* in a manner symbolic of the achievements of Vespasian, we should expect to find the working out of this symbolism in the body of the poem itself. Symbolism of one kind has in fact already been discovered in the poem. Martha Ann Davis concluded that the Argo symbolises the Roman state and that the voyage symbolises the quest for its destiny.[48] However, although consistent with our suspicion of a symbolic substratum, this interpretation of the *Argonautica* fails us in our expectation that Vespasian will be central to this symbolism.

The symbolic representation of Vespasian's achievements will be traced most effectively by examining those areas of the text which are entirely original to Valerius or where Valerius departs in considerable detail from his Apollonian model. It is at these points of the text that the voice of the poet may most clearly be heard.

[41] Cf. D. L. Drew, *The Allegory of the Aeneid* (Oxford, 1927; reprinted New York/London, 1978); Binder, op. cit. (n. 40); P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 358–75; A. Powell, 'The *Aeneid* and the Embarrassments of Augustus' in id. (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London, 1992), pp. 141–74. Drew's use of the term *allegory* with respect to the *Aeneid* is now rightly discredited (cf. Pöschl, ibid.; Powell, op. cit., p. 162).

[42] Cf. Drew, op. cit. (n. 41), pp. 60–85; Binder, op. cit. (n. 40).

[43] F. M. Ahl, 'Statius' "Thebaid": A Reconsideration' *ANRW* 2.32.5 (1986), 2814.

[44] Ahl, ibid., 2832–4.

[45] Hardie, art. cit. (n. 4).

[46] Cf., e.g., Summers, op. cit., pp. 26–33; Hardie, art. cit. (n. 4), 5–9.

[47] Cf. P. White, 'Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome' *JRS* 68 (1978), 84; id., 'Positions for Poets in Early Imperial Rome' in B. K. Gold (ed.), *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, 1982), p. 60; G. Williams, 'Phases in Political Patronage of Literature in Rome' in Gold (ed.), ibid., pp. 3–27; Powell, op. cit. (n. 41).

[48] M. A. Davis, *Flight beyond Time and Change: A New Reading of the 'Argonautica' of Valerius Flaccus* (Diss. Cornell University, 1980).

The theme of dynastic succession

The symbolism within the *Argonautica* concerns, I believe, the succession of the Flavian dynasty after the demise of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The process of succession is represented by the two most prominent members of the Argonautic crew, Hercules and Jason. Hercules represents Augustus, Augustan ideology and all the noble aspects of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Jason represents Vespasian and the hope that lay in him and his offspring of a new dynasty. To these two characters and their relationship I will return shortly. For the moment, let us consider the theme of dynastic succession. This theme was particularly relevant at the time of the composition of the *Argonautica*. The Roman Empire had just emerged from the violence and civil strife of A.D. 69, the 'year of the four emperors'. The succession of Vespasian offered the empire new hopes of civil stability and of a peaceful substitute for the violence that had succeeded the death of Nero: Vespasian was able to provide not one but two male heirs to the throne, Titus and Domitian. Both Josephus (*B.I.* 4.592–7) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.77) represent the existence of Vespasian's sons as a factor contributing to his support from various factions before his accession. After his accession, moreover, Vespasian himself exploited the prospect of a peaceful, dynastic succession as a means of reinforcing the stability of his position. Using coins as evidence, Mattingly[49] concludes that 'Vespasian from the first left no doubt about his intention of founding a dynasty. The busts of his sons, Titus and Domitian, appear facing one another on the reverse, with a legend describing each of them as "Caesar Augusti filius"... On other coins each bears the title of "princeps iuventutis"... The title of "princeps iuventutis" had already come to be a normal designation of the heir apparent'.[50] The succession of the Flavian dynasty after the demise of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, therefore, was a subject of contemporary relevance at the time of the composition of the *Argonautica*.

Internal evidence also supports this symbolic interpretation of the *Argonautica*. As stated above, Valerius' departures from Apollonius are particularly informative. Valerius obviously followed Apollonius in choosing as the primary theme of his epic the Argonautic expedition. He departs from Apollonius, however, by overlaying this primary theme with a secondary theme, that of the succession of powers. The first and most full statement of this theme occurs in Jupiter's speech just before the Argonauts embark upon their adventures:

> tum genitor: 'vetera haec nobis et condita pergunt
> ordine cuncta suo rerumque a principe cursu
> fixa manent; neque enim terris tum sanguis in ullis
> noster erat cum fata darem, iustique facultas
> hinc mihi cum varios struerem per saecula reges.
> atque ego curarum repetam decreta mearum.
> iam pridem regio quae virginis aequor ad Helles
> et Tanai tenus immenso descendit ab Euro
> undat equis floretque viris nec tollere contra
> ulla pares animos nomenque capessere bellis
> ausa manus. sic fata, locos sic ipse fovebam.
> accelerat sed summa dies Asiamque labantem
> linquimus et poscunt iam me sua tempora Grai.
> inde meae quercus tripodesque animaeque parentum
> hanc pelago misere manum. via facta per undas

[49] H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* 2 (London, 1930), pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

[50] For further evidence of the emphasis placed by Vespasian on the dynasty that he would establish, see Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), pp. 22–25; Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), p. liii.

perque hiemes, Bellona, tibi. nec vellera tantum
indignanda manent propriorque ex virgine rapta
ille dolor, sed—nulla magis sententia menti
fixa meae—veniet Phrygia iam pastor ab Ida,
qui gemitus irasque pares et mutua Grais
dona ferat. quae classe dehinc effusa procorum
bella, quot ad Troiam flentes hiberna Mycenas,
quot proceres natosque deum, quae robora cernes
oppetere et magnis Asiam concedere fatis!
hinc Danaum de fine sedet gentesque fovebo
mox alias. pateant montes silvaeque lacusque
cunctaque claustra maris, spes et metus omnibus esto
arbiter. ipse locos terrenaque summa movendo
experiar, quaenam populis longissima cunctis
regna velim linquamque datas ubi certus habenas.' (1.531–560)

Then the father of the gods spoke thus: 'All these things are proceeding as established by me of old, each in accordance with its appointed order, and they remain immutable from the first course of events; for there was no offspring of mine in any lands when I was issuing destinies; hence I was able to act with justice when appointing various kings to take their places throughout the ages. And I shall retrace what I decreed regarding the things in my care. For a long time now, the region which descends from the vast East to the sea of the virgin Helle as far as the Tanais has abounded in steeds and has enjoyed numerous heroes; nor was there any company that dared to rise against it with equal courage and to snatch a reputation in war. Thus I fostered its destiny, thus I myself fostered these places. But the last day is rapidly approaching and I am leaving Asia tottering; now the Greeks demand of me the times allotted to them. Hence my oak trees, the tripods and the spirits of their ancestors have sent this company upon the sea. A way is forged through the waves, through the storms for you, Bellona. Nor does the fleece alone await as a cause of indignation and that more acute grief that stems from the rape of a maiden, but—and no decision is more firmly fixed in my mind—soon there will come from Phrygian Ida a shepherd, who will bring to the Greeks lamentation, like anger and a reciprocal 'gift'. Then, what wars will you see as the suitors stream out from the fleet! How many winter-camps at Troy will you see Mycenae bewailing! How many noblemen and sons of the gods, what strength of manhood will you see die and Asia yield to the great fates! After this I am resolved upon the end of the Greeks and I shall soon foster other races. May the mountains and the woods and the lakes and all the bars of the sea lie open, and let hope and fear be the arbiter for all. I myself shall experiment by moving the seat of power on earth to see what realms I wish to rule longest over all peoples and where, after my decision, I shall leave as a gift the reigns of power.'

In this speech, Valerius clearly links the golden fleece and the rape of Medea with the rape of Helen in the traditional Trojan legend and presents them both as events integral to Jupiter's divine ordination of the succession of powers (1.546ff.).[51] At the outset of the Argonautic expedition, Jupiter asserts that by his will power will pass from Asia to Greece and thence to 'gentes... alias' (1.555–6). A Roman audience nurtured on Virgil's *Aeneid* would have no difficulty in recognizing these 'gentes... alias' as the Roman nation.[52] By this speech, therefore, Valerius clearly incorporates the Argonautic expedition into the traditional mechanisms by which Jupiter had seen to the demise of Asia/Troy and the establishment of the Roman Empire. Valerius later returns to this theme in a soliloquy voiced by Neptune at the imminent death of his son, Amycus (4.114–32). Neptune attributes the impending death of Amycus to the superior power of Jupiter, 'iamiam aliae vires maioraque

[51] R. L. Hunter ('Medea's Flight: The Fourth Book of the *Argonautica*', *CQ* 37 [1987], 138) observes that the link between Medea and Helen had already been established by Euripides and Apollonius.

[52] Cf. W. R. Barnes, 'The Trojan War in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*', *Hermes* 109 (1981), 360–1; W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 14–16.

sanguine nostro/vincunt fata Iovis' (4.126–7). Valerius thereby asserts that the boxing match between Amycus and Pollux (4.99–343) is an integral part of the expedition as it has been ordained by the divine will of Jupiter as a means of ensuring the succession of powers.[53] Further allusions to this theme occur in the sixth, seventh and eighth books of the *Argonautica*. In the sixth book, Jupiter refrains from preserving his son, Colaxes, from certain death because:

> frater adhuc Amyci maeret nece cunctaque divum
> turba fremunt quorum nati cecidere cadentque.
> quin habeat sua quemque dies cunctisque negabo
> quae mihi. (6.626–9)

In the seventh book, Aeetes bitterly summarises the Argonautic expedition in terms that look forward to the eventual fall of Asia to Greece:

> quinquaginta Asiam (pudet heu!) penetrarit Iason
> exulibus? (7.43–4)

Finally, in the eighth book, the Minyae try to persuade Jason to hand Medea back to her brother, Absyrtus, since Mopsus was prophesying that the strife between Europe (i.e. Greece) and Asia (i.e. Troy) should await their descendants:

> nec Marte cruento
> Europam atque Asiam prima haec committat Erinys.
> namque datum hoc fatis, trepidus supplexque canebat
> Mopsus, ut in seros irent magis ista nepotes,
> atque alius lueret tam dira incendia raptor. (8.395–9)

The introduction of this secondary theme into the *Argonautica* establishes a thematic bond between this epic and the *Aeneid*. Virgil himself had attributed the fall of Troy to the succession of powers within the divine will of Jupiter:

> venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus
> Dardaniae. fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium et ingens
> gloria Teucrorum. ferus omnia Iuppiter Argos
> transtulit... (*Aen.* 2.324–7)

This thematic bond between the *Argonautica* and the *Aeneid* reinforces our understanding of Valerius' debt to Virgil. It suggests, moreover, that Valerius' approach to his subject was influenced by Virgil's. Since symbol is such an integral part of the *Aeneid*, so we are again led to expect it in Valerius. The use of the succession of powers theme, moreover, harmonizes well with a symbolic undercurrent concerning the succession of one dynasty upon another.

This symbolic undercurrent rises close to the surface in Jupiter's speech as quoted above. In this speech, Jupiter expresses his will that for the *gentes... alias*, i.e. the Roman people, the mountains, woods, lakes and all the bars of the sea (*cunctaque claustra maris* 556–7) will open up. The last item in this list of natural barriers finds a parallel in the narrative of the *Argonautica* in the form of the Clashing Rocks. In the context of the narrative, however, the Clashing Rocks opens up for a Greek crew and not, as Jupiter's ordination leads us to expect, a Roman crew. The missing link between these Roman and Greek elements is provided by the figure of Jason. The poet establishes Jason as a typological representation of the Roman Emperor, Vespasian, by emphasising the achievements of both men in opening up the sea.[54] Jason in his struggle to pass through the Clashing Rocks represents the Roman Emperor. This

[53] Cf. also H.-O. Kröner, 'Zu den Künstlerischen Absichten des Valerius Flaccus', *Hermes* 96 (1968), 737.

[54] See below, p. 224.

symbolic link not only solves the riddle of Jupiter's statement but draws together the stated secondary theme of the epic (the succession of powers), the symbolic theme (dynastic succession) and the narrative into a single artistic unity.

Hercules–Augustus

In using Hercules to represent Augustus, Valerius could not claim originality. This symbolic relationship had earlier been established by Virgil.[55] In the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, Virgil depicts Hercules in his struggle with Cacus in a manner which identifies him closely with Aeneas.[56] In the sixth book, moreover, Virgil compares Augustus' future greatness with Hercules' past achievements:[57]

> nec vero Alcides tantum telluris obivit,
> fixerit aeripedem cervam licet, aut Erymanthi
> pacarit nemora et Lernam tremefecerit arcu; (*Aen.* 6.801–3)

Horace in his third Roman Ode also relates Augustus to Hercules:

> hac arte Pollux et vagus Hercules
> enisus arces attigit igneas,
> quos inter Augustus recumbens
> purpureo bibet ore nectar. (Horace, *Carm.* 3.3.9–12)

Ovid, likewise, declared that Augustus, like Hercules, had received καταστερισμός because of his *virtus*:[58]

> sic victor laudem superatis Liber ab Indis
> Alcides capta traxit ab Oechalia,
> et modo, Caesar, avum, quem virtus addidit astris,
> sacrarunt aliqua carmina parte tuum. (Ovid, *Pont.* 4.8.61–4)

These three Augustan poets, then, acknowledge clearly a certain parallelism between the characters and lives of Augustus and Hercules. Their expression of this parallelism emphasises three particular points of comparison, Hercules/Augustus as σωτήρ, Hercules/Augustus as recipients of apotheosis and Hercules/Augustus as models of supreme *virtus*.[59] Clearly, then, the use of Hercules to symbolise Augustus is theoretically plausible. To what extent, however, can this theoretical plausibility be converted into actual evidence of such symbolism? Useful research into Valerius' handling of the character of Hercules has already been published by Adamietz.[60] Adamietz was particularly interested in the differences between Apollonius' treatment of Hercules and Valerius'. He notes the following significant departures: (1) Valerius gives more emphasis to Hercules than Apollonius had done;[61] (2) Valerius introduces into his epic several episodes that portray Hercules as a figure of deliverance (cf. 2.451–578; 4.58–81; 5.154–76);[62] (3) Valerius portrays Hercules as a proven hero, who has already completed many of his twelve labours; by contrast in the Apollonian account, Glaucus indicates to the Minyae that Hercules has his twelve labours still to

[55] Association with Hercules as a means of glorifying a ruler was first exploited in a literary context by Theocritus, *Id.* 17.20–33.

[56] See G. K. Galinsky, 'The Hercules–Cacus Episode in *Aeneid* VIII', *AJPh* 87 (1966), 18–51; id., op. cit. (n. 32), pp. 141–9; Binder, op. cit. (n. 40). Cf. also D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford, 1991), p. 161.

[57] Cf. Galinsky, op. cit. (n. 32), p. 136.

[58] Galinsky, op. cit. (n. 32), p. 140.

[59] Cf. Galinsky, op. cit. (n. 32), pp. 136, 138, 140; Feeney, op. cit. (n. 56), p. 161.

[60] J. Adamietz, 'Jason und Hercules in den Epen des Apollonios Rhodios und Valerius Flaccus', *Antike und Abendland* 16 (1970), 29–38.

[61] Adamietz, ibid., 30; cf. also M. Piot, 'Hercule chez les Poètes du I^er^ Siècle après J.C.', *REL* 43 (1965), 353–8.

[62] Adamietz, ibid., 32–4.

accomplish (1.1317–20). Adamietz believes that this last departure from the Apollonian version was motivated by the desire to present Hercules as being closer to apotheosis.[63] He observes that in the eighth book Hercules already appears in the circle of the gods:

> qualis sanguineo victor Gradivus ab Hebro
> Idalium furto subit aut dilecta Cythera
> seu cum caelestes Alcidae invisere mensas
> iam vacat et fessum Iunonia sustinet Hebe. (8.228–31)

Valerius' decision to portray Hercules as being close to apotheosis was motivated, I believe, by the desire to make the character of Hercules serve the symbolic level of meaning outlined above. Valerius' manipulation of Hercules' character, indeed, demonstrates the same emphases as exhibited by the three Augustan poets who likened Augustus to Hercules. As Virgil, Horace and Ovid before him, so Valerius also focuses on Hercules as σωτήρ and Hercules as the recipient of apotheosis, the latter being, to the Roman mind, the inevitable reward of one's benefactions and *virtus*.[64] Public acclamation as σωτήρ[65] and apotheosis were, of course, dear to the imperial heart. These aspects of Valerius' treatment of Hercules, therefore, support an interpretation of Hercules as a typological representation of Augustus.

Jason–Vespasian

If a level of symbolism exists within the *Argonautica*, Vespasian, whose expansion of navigational frontiers correlates clearly with the poet's expression of the main subject of his epic, should be central to that symbolism:[66] this is only a logical assumption in the context of a Roman Empire where flattery of the ruling emperor was commonplace, if not expected. There can be little doubt as to the character appropriate as a symbol of Vespasian. No other character would be suitable to symbolise Vespasian, the leader of the Roman Empire, than the leader of the Argonautic crew, Jason himself. To scholars familiar with the Argonautic legend as it is presented by Apollonius, however, Jason is notorious for his failure to display the traditional heroic and dominant qualities expected of a leader.[67] It would not be tactful—or perhaps one should say safe—to use a weak character as a symbol of the ruling emperor. The research published by Adamietz, however, demonstrates that we should not attribute this weakness of character to the Jason who appears in Valerius' *Argonautica*.[68] Adamietz shows that Valerius departs from Apollonius' characterization of Jason in the following respects: (1) in Valerius, Jason *takes* command of the expedition from the moment that it is conceived; in Apollonius, by contrast, there is a contest for the leadership, which Hercules refuses to accept and Jason weakly wins by default;[69] (2) Valerius clearly distinguishes Jason's rôle from that of Hercules: Jason is the leader of the expedition whereas Hercules is the strong man.[70] These changes that Adamietz has observed in the characterization of Jason are motivated again, I believe, by the desire to serve the symbolic level of the epic, whereby Jason typologically represents Vespasian. Further evidence of this typological representation, moreover, abounds in the text.

[63] Adamietz, ibid., 34.
[64] Cf. Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 32; Galinsky, op. cit. (n. 32), p. 140.
[65] Cf., e.g. V. M. Scramuzza, 'Claudius Soter Euergetes', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 51 (1940), 261–6.
[66] See above, pp. 216–17.
[67] Cf. Hunter, '"Short on Heroics": Jason in the *Argonautica*' *CQ* 38 (1988), 436–53.
[68] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60).
[69] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 30.
[70] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 31.

Firstly, there is one highly significant departure from Apollonius' treatment of the events at Colchis. In Apollonius' version, Aeetes is enraged at the presumption of the Argonauts who wish to claim the golden fleece; in order to conciliate him, Jason offers to fight on his behalf against the Sauromatae or any other tribe that the king of Colchis wishes to subdue (*Arg.* 3.386–95); Aeetes, however, refuses this offer and demands instead that Jason meet the challenge of the fire-breathing bulls on the plain of Ares (*Arg.* 3.401ff.). In Valerius' version, when Jason claims the golden fleece, Aeetes deceitfully replies that he shall receive it as the reward for defeating Perses, Aeetes' brother, in battle (*Arg.* 5.532–41). This battle is entirely original to Valerius and occupies the whole of the sixth book. Valerius uses it as an opportunity to portray Jason displaying valour independent of any divine or human agency. Medea stands on the walls of the city, marvelling at his achievements:

> quaque iterum tacito sparsit vaga lumina vultu
> aut fratris quaerens aut pacti coniugis arma,
> saevus ibi miserae solusque occurrit Iason.
> tunc his germanam adgreditur, ceu nescia, dictis:
> 'quis, precor, hic, toto iamdudum fervere campo
> quem tueor quemque ipsa vides? nam te quoque tali
> attonitam virtute reor.' contra aspera Iuno
> reddit agens stimulis ac diris fraudibus urget.
> 'ipsum' ait 'Aesoniden cernis, soror, aequore tanto
> debita cognati repetit qui vellera Phrixi,
> nec nunc laude prior generis nec sanguine quisquam.
> aspicis ut Minyas inter proceresque Cytaeos
> emicet effulgens quantisque insultet acervis... (6.584–96)

The Jason of Valerius' *Argonautica*, therefore, exhibits valour worthy of a Roman emperor. The introduction of this battle and of the above τειχοσκοπία, moreover, provides a credible reason on a human level for Medea's decision to help Jason overcome the fire-breathing bulls, a reason which balances the later intervention of divine machinery.

Further intimation that Valerius is using Jason to symbolise Vespasian is found in the echoes of the dedication to the latter (1.5–21) in the description and treatment of the former. At the outset of the epic, for example, Jason voices his understanding of the nature of his mission with words that clearly echo the *tuque o pelagi cui maior aperti/ fama* of the dedication of the work to Vespasian (1.7–8):

> o quantum terrae, quantum cognoscere caeli
> permissum est! pelagus quantos aperimus in usus! (1.168–9)

The main obstacle to be overcome in this task of opening up the seas is represented in the Argonautic expedition by the Clashing Rocks (4.637ff.). In the face of this obstacle, Jason leads his terrified companions by example, thus putting them to shame (4.647–55). The subsequent successful passage of the Argonauts through these rocks is then described in terms which recall the compliment that Valerius had earlier paid to Vespasian:

> ...siqua per hos *undis* umquam ratis isset *apertis*.
> tum freta, quae longis fuerant impervia saeclis
> ad subitam stupuere ratem, Pontique iacentis
> omne solum regesque patent gentesque repostae. (4.710–13)

References to the Clashing Rocks subsequently occur at frequent intervals throughout the remainder of the epic, thus ensuring that the reader/audience cannot forget the magnitude of this achievement or its consequences (cf., e.g., 5.84–5; 7.41–2; 8.178ff.).

The relationship of Hercules–Augustus to Jason–Vespasian

Adamietz, in the valuable article that I have cited previously, demonstrates that Valerius is at pains to emphasise the close relationship between the two heroes.[71] The poet achieves this close relationship by depicting the character of Jason in such a way that he deserves comparable respect,[72] by assigning to them separate roles so that one does not eclipse the other[73] and chiefly by presenting the mission imposed upon Jason in terms that reflect the twelve labours imposed upon Hercules.[74] In the first half of the epic Hercules appears as a proven hero whereas Jason, the undisputed leader, is at the start of his career. In the second half of the epic, Hercules retires from participation in the mission and subsequently appears in the circle of the gods;[75] it is in this half of the epic that Jason proves his abilities. Jason's mission and Pelias, its instigator, are explicitly compared to the twelve labours of Hercules and to Eurystheus:[76]

> ille meum imperiis urget caput, ille *labores*
> dat *varios*, suus ut magnum rex spargit ab Argis
> Alciden, Sthenelo ipse satus. (5.486–8)

When Jason fights the earth-born warriors, Valerius compares him to Hercules fighting the hydra, in which situation he too, of course, needed the help of a maiden:[77]

> nec magis aut illis aut illis milibus ultra
> sufficit, ad dirae quam cum Tirynthius hydrae
> agmina Palladios defessus respicit ignes. (7.622–4)

When Jason takes upon his shoulders the golden fleece, Valerius likens him to Hercules wearing the skin of the Nemean lion:[78]

> micat omnis ager, villisque comantem
> sidereis totos pellem nunc fundit in artus,
> nunc in colla refert, nunc implicat ille sinistrae.
> talis ab Inachiis Nemeae Tirynthius antris
> ibat, adhuc aptans umeris capitique leonem. (8.122–6)

New evidence of Valerius' desire to portray Jason as a second Hercules may be found in the prelude to the battle against the Scythians at the end of the fifth book. Before this battle, Aeetes follows a traditional pattern and invites Jason and his men to a feast. This feast gives the two leaders the opportunity to introduce their main warriors to the other. Aeetes reveals that the five Asian chieftains fighting on his behalf against Perses are Carmeius (5.582), Aron (5.587), Campesus (5.590), Odrussa (5.591), Iaxartes (5.593). It is not by coincidence, I believe, that the initial letters of these chieftains spell out *cacoi*, a word which, when understood in its Greek transliteration, κακοί, describes them as the embodiment of evil.[79] The significance of this acrostic, however, does not lie merely in this description. This acrostic, indeed, identifies Aeetes not just with a number of obscure names but with the concept of evil embodied in the word Cacoi. By his alliance, moreover, Aeetes might be considered as a sixth member of this group of Cacoi. When Jason later finds himself in open opposition to Aeetes, therefore, Valerius presents him as fighting *a* Cacus as before him Virgil had presented Hercules fighting *the* Cacus (*Aen.* 8.184–275).

[71] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 29.
[72] See above, p. 223.
[73] See above, p. 223.
[74] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 29, 34.
[75] See above, p. 223.
[76] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 36.
[77] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 37.
[78] Adamietz, art. cit. (n. 60), 37.
[79] Cf. C. J. Fordyce (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Libri VII–VIII* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 224–5.

Valerius, then, presents Jason and Hercules as heroes of comparable merit being tested in comparable situations. This presentation accords well with our understanding of each as the symbolic representation of a man of equal imperial status. The closeness of the relationship between Jason and Hercules, moreover, can be understood to allude to Vespasian's clear desire to model himself upon Augustus. The evidence for this desire lies to a large extent in the coinage minted by Vespasian. Mattingly attributes Vespasian's revival of the two types of *Divus Augustus*, Altar and Eagle, to his desire to rank as Augustus' successor.[80] The coins of the early Flavian period frequently figure representations of Pax, Concordia, Victoria and other such deified virtues assumed originally by Augustus and now in his footsteps by Vespasian.[81] Vespasian, moreover, instituted a building programme that would rival that instituted by Augustus.[82] Vespasian's imitation of Augustus, therefore, provides a clear parallel with Valerius' presentation of Jason and Hercules and thus lends further support to a symbolic reading of his *Argonautica*.

The process of succession

Within a symbolic reading of the *Argonautica* pertaining to dynastic succession, we might justifiably expect to find some representation of the actual process of succession. The representation of this process is again betrayed by the originality of the poet. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Hercules retires from active participation in the expedition at the end of the first book. Valerius, on the other hand, places his retirement at the beginning of the fourth book, much closer to the central point of the epic. This restructuring reinforces the evidence of the equality of the two heroes in Valerius' epic and presents Hercules' abandonment as an event of central importance. The events surrounding the abandonment of Hercules, moreover, depart subtly from those described by Apollonius. In Apollonius, the Argonauts abandon Hercules inadvertently and Telamon accuses Jason of having engineered this situation in order that Hercules might not eclipse Jason's glory if they managed to return to Greece (1.1273–95). In Valerius, the Argonauts realise that Hercules is missing and wait a full six days before deciding that they must proceed on their venture without him (3.598–725). This departure once again serves the symbolic intention: each day represents one principate between that of Augustus and that of Vespasian. In this number of principates I include Galba but exclude Otho and Vitellius. The latter two emperors were rival claimants to the throne during the civil war of A.D. 69 and would most tactfully be disregarded. When Galba had acceded to the throne, on the other hand, Vespasian had immediately sent Titus to congratulate him (Suetonius, *Div. Tit.* 5). Upon succeeding to the throne himself, Vespasian made it a policy to show continued respect for Galba. Commemorative coins were struck in his honour and the titles *Augustus* and *Pater Patriae* bestowed upon him posthumously.[83] The six days, therefore, represent the principates of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Galba. On the seventh day, Jason proceeds on his mission and starts to prove his abilities in a Herculean manner.[84] Symbolically this seventh day represents the accession of Vespasian, the point in his career when he begins to show himself to be a worthy successor to Augustus.

[80] Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), p. xlix.

[81] Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), p. xxxviii; Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), pp. 25–32. Cf. also J. R. Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues' *ANRW* 17.2 (1981), 899–901.

[82] Cf. Suetonius, *Div. Vesp.* 9; Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 32.

[83] Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), pp. xix–xx; cf. also ibid., p. xlvii.

[84] See above, p. 225.

Valerius' desire to incorporate into his epic symbolism relating to Vespasian's accession seems to have motivated one further departure from Apollonius' *Argonautica*. In Apollonius, the Minyae are instructed by Phineus to find out whether they can pass through the Clashing Rocks safely by releasing a dove to fly through them (2.328–9); obedient to this instruction, they release the dove, which flies through the rocks losing only her tail feathers (2.561–73). In Valerius, on the other hand, Phineus does not offer the Minyae any way of testing whether they may pass through the Clashing Rocks safely (cf. 4.561–86). There is little in his speech by way of encouragement:

> di tibi progresso propius, di forsitan ipsi
> auxilium mentemque dabunt. (4.567–8)

As the Minyae approach the rocks, however, a comet passes through the rocks (4.670–76), which Jason receives as an omen of good fortune:

> 'sequor, o quicumque deorum'
> Aesonides, '†vel fallis†' (4.674–5)

The significance of Valerius' decision to replace Apollonius' dove with a comet is clarified by a second reference to a comet later in the epic. On this occasion, Jason is engaged in the battle against the Scythians and Valerius compares the plume on his helmet to a comet foretelling the end of *regna iniusta*:

> cursuque ardescit...
> ...iubae laetabile sidus Achivae,
> acer ut autumno canis iratoque locati
> ab Iove fatales ad regna iniusta cometae. (6.606ff.)

On both occasions, then, Valerius introduces the subject of a comet with specific reference to Jason. On both occasions, moreover, I believe that Valerius is alluding to the comets which appeared in A.D. 60 and 64 and which were understood to presage the death of the emperor (cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 36; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.22; 15.47). In the *Argonautica*, Valerius exploits this symbol of succession at a time when Hercules, the Augustan figure, has just retired from participation in the expedition. He demonstrates the relevance of this theme to Jason, the Flavian figure, by making him accept the omen and by later comparing his helmet to this symbol. In replacing Apollonius' dove with a comet, therefore, Valerius again supplies evidence of the existence of two levels of meaning in his epic, the surface and the symbolic.

The second reference to a comet at 6.606ff. presents the process of succession as complete. In his depiction here of Jason's helmet, Valerius evokes the iconographic representation of both Augustus and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*:

> hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar
> cum patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis,
> stans celsa in puppi, geminas cui tempora flammas
> laeta vomunt patriumque aperitur vertice sidus. (*Aen.* 8.678–81)

> iamque in conspectu Teucros habet [Aeneas] et sua castra
> stans celsa in puppi, clipeum cum deinde sinistra
> extulit ardentem...
> ...
> ardet apex capiti cristisque a vertice flamma
> funditur et vastos umbo vomit aureus ignis:
> non secus ac liquida si quando nocte cometae
> sanguinei lugubre rubent... (*Aen.* 10.260–2, 270–3)

Virgil emphasises the symbolic relationship between Aeneas and Augustus in these two passages by the repetition of the phrase *stans celsa in puppi* and of the flame-omen

around the head, a sign of divine blessing.[85] Aeneas and Augustus, moreover, both find themselves at the brink of a decisive battle and the shield which Aeneas raises is that on which Augustus is depicted in comparable fashion.[86] Valerius draws an analogy between Jason and Virgil's Aeneas by echoing both the motif of a star-/flame-clad helmet and the allusion to the Julian comet, which Augustus had adopted as a symbol of his status. These echoes associate Jason with the iconographic representation of Aeneas and the status enjoyed by Augustus. At this point in the Flavian epic, then, Jason is the new Aeneas: on the symbolic level, moreover, Vespasian is shown to be the new Augustus.

The intention of the above discussion was to illustrate that there is a symbolic level of meaning in the *Argonautica* pertaining to dynastic succession. Not only the broad outline of the epic but also many details serve this symbolic undercurrent. These details reveal the degree of effort that Valerius expended in the creation of this undercurrent. We might anticipate, therefore, further elaboration of this symbolism in the treatment of many other characters in his *Argonautica*. Valerius inherited many of his characters from an established literary tradition. Deliberate departures from this literary tradition will lead us to an understanding of their symbolic status. Some characters, on the other hand, are the product of the poet's own imagination. Consideration of these must be deferred to a separate article. In the meantime, I wish to conclude this article by assessing the symbolic status of Pelias, Aeetes, Medea, Aeson and Alcimede.

Pelias/Aeetes–Nero

Valerius uses both Pelias and Aeetes, I believe, as symbols of Nero. Pelias and Aeetes are both villains in the *Argonautica*. Nero, of course, was the arch-villain of the Julio-Claudian line. Literary tradition had established that Pelias and Aeetes were cruel, treacherous tyrants. The Roman historians and poets leave no doubt but that Nero was of a similarly evil nature. Martial asks 'quid Nerone peius', assuming that the example of Nero is comparable to that of Charinus 'vir pessimus omnium' (*Ep.* 7.34.4). Tacitus puts into the mouth of the condemned Seneca 'cui enim ignaram fuisse saevitiam Neronis?' (*Ann.* 15.62) and himself refers to the 'crudelitatem principis, cui ceterae libidines cedebant' (*Ann.* 16.18). In the *Argonautica*, Pelias inflicts upon Jason a journey that is tantamount to exile inasmuch as he does not anticipate any prospect of a safe return; Aeetes imposes upon the same young hero a task that is almost certain to lead to death. Each villain, therefore, reflects Nero's propensity for exacting harsh punishments. Tacitus records numerous instances of prominent men being forced by Nero into exile (cf., e.g. *Ann.* 15.71) and declares some anxiety lest the number of deaths and suicides witnessed in the period should cause his account to be monotonous.[87] In the *Argonautica*, Jason triumphs over the attempts of both tyrants to destroy him. So too did Vespasian triumph over the adversities and dangers imposed upon him by Nero. Suetonius records that after the accession of Nero Vespasian lived in retirement through fear of the influence that Agrippina exercised over the emperor to satisfy her animosity against friends of the late Narcissus (Suetonius, *Div. Vesp.* 4). In A.D. 66, Vespasian suffered the

[85] Cf. S. J. Harrison, *Vergil, Aeneid 10* (Oxford, 1991), *ad* 261–2 and 270–5.

[86] Harrison, op. cit., *ad* 261–2.

[87] 'Etiam si bella externa et obitas pro re publica mortes tanta casuum similitudine memorarem, meque ipsum satias cepisset aliorumque taedium exspectarem, quamvis honestos civium exitus, tristes tamen et continuos aspernantium: at nunc patientia servilis tantumque sanguinis domi perditum fatigant animum et maestitia restringunt' (Tac. *Ann.* 16.16).

displeasure of Nero personally by displaying insufficient enthusiasm for the emperor's skill in lyre-playing (Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 4; *Nero* 22). In fear for his life, Vespasian fled to a remote town. At the end of the same year, however, Nero ordered Vespasian to command an army to subdue the Jewish uprising (Suetonius, *Div. Vesp.* 4). Ironically, Suetonius suggests that Vespasian had been chosen as the commander of this army on account of his humble social status and the unlikelihood of his posing a threat to Nero. It was chiefly his military success in this operation, however, that brought Vespasian into the limelight and made him a strong candidate for imperial power. Vespasian's ultimate triumph over Nero may be regarded as his accession to the imperial throne subsequent to the demise of Nero.

Literary tradition offered Valerius a fortuitous detail that greatly assisted in forging the symbolic relationship between Aeetes and Nero. According to tradition, the location of Jason's battle against the fire-breathing bulls was the νειὸς Ἄρηος or the field of Ares (Apollon. 3.411, 754). After translation into Latin, this location became the 'Martius... campus' (Val. Flacc. 7.62–3). This designation, the Campus Martius, in actual topographical terms, defines a large area in the north-west of Rome bounded by the Tiber and the Via Flaminia. Nero was associated with this area by his construction there of a large wooden amphitheatre (Tac. *Ann.* 13.31; Suet. *Nero* 12). Suetonius and Tacitus record that Nero forced knights, senators and distinguished women to fight in this amphitheatre, even though they were rich and respectable (Suet. ibid.; Tac. *Ann.* 15.32). The appearance in the arena of these respected personages was shocking in itself (cf. Tac. ibid. and *Ann.* 14.14). Suetonius, moreover, notes that some were ordered to fight wild beasts (Suet. ibid.). Compare this disgraceful behaviour of Nero to that of Aeetes: Aeetes orders Jason, a Thessalian noble, to pit himself against two fire-breathing bulls on the 'Martius... campus' (7.62–3). The similarity in the behaviour of the two tyrants speaks for itself. The traditional location of Jason's battle merely reinforces this similarity, a connection that would not be lost on an educated Roman audience.

Finally, Valerius alludes to the typological function of Aeetes by placing considerable emphasis on this tyrant's descent from Sol, the sun-god. The poet refers to Aeetes as *Soligenae/Soligenam* (5.223, 317), *Sole satus* (5.263, 456, 567), *flammigeri proles Perseia Solis* (5.581) and *rex Hyperionide* (5.471). By contrast, Apollonius refers to Aeetes' descent from Helios only three times directly (2.1204; 3.309; 3.598) and four times indirectly by association (4.221; 4.229; 4.727; 4.1019). By emphasising Aeetes' descent from the sun-god, Valerius reinforces the typological relationship between the mythological tyrant and Nero. In the east, Nero was celebrated as νέος Ἥλιος.[88] On Neronian coinage, moreover, a radiate crown sometimes adorns the ruling emperor's head, contravening earlier precedent whereby this honour was reserved for deified emperors.[89] In Rome, Nero had commissioned for his Domus Aurea a colossal statue of himself (Suetonius, *Nero* 31). Unfortunately, in the absence of any extant archaeological evidence, there is uncertainty regarding the manner in which Nero was depicted. Many scholars, however, believe that the head of the statue was crowned with rays in the likeness of Sol. Pliny informs us that after Nero's death the statue was consecrated to Sol (*NH* 34.45).[90]

Valerius exploits the symbolic significance of Aeetes' descent from Sol to serve the basic structure of the symbolic level of meaning. We noted earlier that the fundamental theme on this level of meaning was the succession of the Flavian dynasty and that this symbolic theme bore some relation to the secondary theme of the epic,

[88] K. R. Bradley, *Suetonius' Life of Nero: An Historical Commentary* (Brussels, 1978), p. 176.
[89] Scott, op. cit. (n. 20), pp. 32–3.
[90] Bradley, op. cit. (n. 80), pp. 175–6.

the succession of powers leading to the establishment of the Roman Empire. At the first statement of this secondary theme in the narrative (1.531–60), Jupiter declares his sovereignty and indicates his plans for transferring power from one nation to the next. It is of considerable significance to our understanding of the symbolic undercurrent in the epic that this speech of Jupiter does not appear without motivation, but is prompted by Sol's request that the Argonautic expedition should be prevented from proceeding (1.503–27). Valerius thus presents the Argonautic expedition as the triumph of Jupiter's will over Sol's will within the former's ordination for the succession of powers. In the context of the mythological epic, this triumph is witnessed in the supremacy of Jason over Aeetes. On the symbolic level of the epic, this presentation of the *Argonautica* as the superiority of Jupiter over Sol can be interpreted as the demise of the emperor favoured by Sol and the accession of the emperor to whom Jupiter, the supreme god, has handed over power. The former can easily be identified as Nero; the latter can likewise be identified as the ruling emperor, i.e. Vespasian. In A.D. 75, indeed, Vespasian struck coins bearing the legend IOVIS CUSTOS, commemorating the protection which Jupiter had afforded him against subversive plots.[91] Prominent among the achievements of his building programme, moreover, is the rebuilding of the temple of Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus.[92]

In using two characters in the epic to represent one person, Valerius risked creating confusion. He makes great effort to avoid any such confusion, however, by drawing together the characters of the two villains by explicit assimilation.[93] After the battle with the Scythians, for example, Jason learns that Aeetes does not intend to uphold his promise of the golden fleece, unless the young hero first tames the fire-breathing bulls, ploughs the Campus Martius, sows the Cadmean dragon's teeth and fights the earth-born warriors. Jason responds to this treachery with:

> alium hic Pelian, alia aequora cerno (7.92)

Later on, when Medea presents Jason with the gifts that will enable him to achieve the tasks assigned to him by Aeetes, her words imply that Pelias is responsible for his current crisis:

> cape munera supplex
> nunc mea; teque iterum Pelias si perdere quaeret
> inque alios casus, alias si mittet ad urbes,
> heu formae ne crede tuae. (7.446–9)

At the beginning of the epic, moreover, Valerius presents Pelias' thoughts in a way that foreshadows Aeetes' later actions. Pelias considers what task will effectively destroy Jason:

> sed neque bella videt Graias neque monstra per urbes
> ulla: Cleonaeo iam tempora clausus hiatu
> Alcides, olim Lernae defensus ab angue
> Arcas et *ambobus iam cornua fracta iuvencis.*
> ira maris vastique placent discrimina ponti. (1.33–7)

Pelias' decision to send Jason on a dangerous journey across the sea, then, derives from the absence of any suitable wars or monsters at home. The poet's motivation regarding the selection of monsters listed lies partly in a desire to represent the magnitude of Jason's task as being equal to the labours undertaken by Hercules:[94] the

[91] Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), p. xxxix. *Iovis* here is an old nominative form.

[92] Platner and Ashby, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 300.

[93] Hunter (*Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica Book III* (Cambridge, 1989), 405–6n. and 594n.) observes that there is also some parallelism in Apollonius' treatment of these two tyrants.

[94] See above, p. 225.

Nemean lion and the Lernaean hydra are two of the most familiar of these labours. *Two* bulls, however, do not belong to the traditional number of Hercules' labours. *One* must certainly be identified as the Cretan bull; the other will be the River Achelous, who in his fight against Hercules transformed himself into a bull and had one horn broken by his opponent (Ovid, *Met.* 9.1–88).[95] The striking inclusion of this 'monster' in the list of those encountered by Hercules in his traditional labours points to some special significance. The significance of this allusion is the parity it demonstrates between Pelias and Aeetes: Aeetes set Jason against two fire-breathing bulls; Pelias would have done the same, if only he had been able.

Not only does Valerius ensure in this way that the use of two characters to represent Nero does not create confusion, but he also exploits this duality to the benefit of the symbolic level of meaning. In creating his narrative, Valerius had to work within the relatively strict limits of an established literary tradition. It was possible for him, as we have seen, to make minor adaptations in characterization. It was possible for him to draw upon the details of little-known versions of the legend. It was not possible, however, to sweep aside the fundamental, structural elements of the legend, namely that the expedition was instigated by the cruelty of Pelias and brought to its climax by the cruelty of Aeetes. Valerius had no choice, therefore, but to receive two villains into his epic. In representing both villains as symbols of Nero, Valerius unifies the opposition set against Vespasian in his symbolic journey towards accession. This unification achieves on the symbolic level of the epic a polarity in the opposition of bad/Nero to good/Vespasian. This polarity in turn compounds the opposition which Vespasian faces and thus enhances the triumph which he achieves.

Medea–Berenice

The characterization of Medea in an epic designed to glorify Vespasian required supreme tact upon the part of the poet. It was of utmost importance that at all times the typological representation of Vespasian should be seen to be virtuous and noble. Literary tradition, however, demanded that Jason, the character by whom Vespasian is represented, should later abandon Medea. Apollonius does not recount this part of the legend of Jason and Medea in the context of his *Argonautica* but alludes to it in various ways.[96] The *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus is, of course, unfinished and we do not know, therefore, precisely how Valerius intended to treat this issue. There is strong evidence, however, to suggest that Valerius intended his *Argonautica* to consist in total of eight books.[97] Since the extant work breaks off at 8.467 and since each

[95] I find Hollis' argument (A. S. Hollis, *Callimachus*: *Hecale* [Oxford, 1990], p. 218) that the 'two "iuvenci" would most appropriately be the Cretan and Marathonian bulls' unconvincing. The Marathonian bull is associated with Theseus. In this list of four monsters, the first two, the Nemean lion and Lernaean hydra, have specific reference to Hercules; a third, one of the two *iuvenci* (1.36) implicitly refers to Hercules, for there can be no doubt that the Cretan bull is meant. The fourth monster is not explicitly associated with any hero. It is, however, coupled with an implicit reference to Hercules. The poet, moreover, does not signal a change; nor is there an apparent motive for a sudden switch from Hercules to Theseus. In the context, such a switch could only jolt awkwardly. This fourth monster, then, must surely have reference to Hercules and can only be Achelous. It is true that the reference to Achelous in association with monsters tackled by Hercules is surprising. However, it is the surprise itself that alerts the reader to the significance of the statement and the parallelism it draws between Pelias and Aeetes.

[96] Cf., e.g. Hunter, art. cit. (n. 51 [1987]), 133–4; id., art. cit. (n. 67 [(1988]), 440; id., op. cit. (n. 93), p. 30.

[97] Cf. B. E. Lewis, 'The Significance of the Location of Valerius Flaccus' Second Proem', *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987), 420–2.

complete book contains between 650 and 850 lines, it follows that between two and four hundred lines remain unwritten. In this small number of lines it is barely possible that Valerius could have recounted or wanted to recount the latter part of the legend of Jason and Medea. He could not, however, afford to pass over this part of the legend in silence. Silence would allow the typological relationship between Jason and Vespasian to be interpreted as a two-edged sword, with one stroke both praising and damning. Ovid and Seneca, moreover, had recently published tragedies on the latter part of the Medea legend and this would, therefore, be fresh in a Roman audience's mind.[98] However, Valerius did not face this delicate situation unaided: Virgil had tackled a similar problem in his presentation of Dido and Aeneas. Aeneas, of course, abandons Dido. Virgil, however, shows that he acts not on the impulse of a callous whim but in the interests of his nation; the happiness of the individual must be sacrificed to the welfare of the majority.[99] Valerius articulates the same sentiment in the *Argonautica*: when the Argonauts face the prospect of a battle against the Colchians, they protest to Jason that they have no desire to be exposed to danger on behalf of a foreign woman (8.385ff.):

> respiceret pluresque animas maioraque fata
> tot comitum, qui non furiis nec amore nefando
> per freta, sed sola sese virtute sequantur.
> an vero, ut thalamis raptisque indulgeat unus
> coniugiis? (8.389–93)

In this way, Valerius starts to absolve Jason from the guilt with which he could be associated by the audience's knowledge of his future treatment of Medea. In the same process, the poet also frees the symbolic relationship between Jason and Vespasian from any suspicion that it was conceived as a vehicle for criticism.

The relationship between Jason and Medea in the *Argonautica* echoes aspects of the relationships between Vespasian, Titus and Queen Berenice. Berenice was born in A.D. 28, the daughter of Agrippa I, king of the Jews. She is first mentioned by the historians for her part in the unsuccessful efforts made to dissuade the Jews from their rebellion in A.D. 66 (Josephus, *B.I.* 2.343–402). This was the rebellion that Nero appointed Vespasian to subdue. In the civil war of A.D. 69, Tacitus records that Berenice enthusiastically supported Vespasian, to whom *seni quoque* she was *magnificentia munerum grata* (*Hist.* 2.81). The nature of these gifts is not specified. Tacitus does, however, feel it appropriate to mention at the same time that Berenice was *florens aetate formaque* and we may suspect, therefore, that Vespasian found her very attractive. In A.D. 75, Berenice found herself again in the news for her amorous relationship with Titus. Cassius Dio (65.15) indicates that this affair was unpopular in Rome and that he therefore sent her away. Like Medea, therefore, Berenice gave help to a foreigner; like Medea, she fell in love with a foreigner; like Medea, Berenice was rejected by this foreigner in the interests of his nation. The foreigner in Berenice's case, however, is not a single person but the father and son couplet of Vespasian and Titus. In this matter, Valerius again seems to be imitating Virgil. The circumstances and behaviour of Virgil's Dido often recall the tragic figure of Cleopatra VII; she, like Dido, loved a leader and committed suicide when abandoned.[100] Augustus, however, whom Aeneas often represents, had not indulged in any passionate romance with this

[98] The two surviving fragments of Ovid's play are published by F. W. Lenz (ed.), *P. Ovidius Naso Vol. III Fasc. 2 Fastorum Libri VI, Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1932), p. 233.

[99] Cf. Drew, op. cit. (n. 41), pp. 83–4. For Virgil's tact in handling other political embarrassments of Augustus see also Powell, op. cit. (n. 41).

[100] Cf. Drew, op. cit. (n. 41), pp. 82–5.

Eastern queen. At this point in the epic, Aeneas relates to Augustus' adoptive father, Julius Caesar,[101] whose amorous relationship with Cleopatra is, of course, well known. As Virgil's Aeneas symbolises both father and son in his love-affair with Dido, so too Valerius' Jason symbolises both father and son in his love-affair with Medea. Valerius, however, has introduced one neat inversion, whereby the symbolic significance of the mythological hero is extended to incorporate a son instead of a father. The extension in itself promotes the symbolic theme of the *Argonautica*: the embodiment of father and son within one symbol signifies the dynastic continuity of Vespasian's reign; not only Vespasian will succeed the Julio–Claudian line, but also Titus. The function of Jason is as a symbol of Vespasian as the embodiment of a new dynasty.

Aeson and Alcimede–Thrasea Paetus and Arria

Valerius' treatment of Aeson and Alcimede, Jason's father and mother, differs significantly from that of Apollonius. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Aeson and Alcimede are very distressed at Jason's departure (1.260–91); Aeson is a sick man confined to bed (1.263–4); Jason tries to encourage them and then takes his leave (1.293–316). No more do we learn. In Valerius' *Argonautica*, Aeson and Alcimede are similarly distressed at Jason's departure (1.296–8; 1.317–49); Valerius emphasises that Aeson is a man prevented from joining the expedition not by lack of courage but by his advanced age; his former prowess has been demonstrated by his outstanding achievements (1.335–47). After Jason and his crew have embarked upon the expedition, Valerius takes a bold and original step by returning to Thessaly to describe the fate of Aeson and Alcimede. Jason had earlier persuaded Acastus, Pelias' son, to accompany him (1.149–83; 1.484–93). When Pelias realises that he has thus been deprived of his son, he decides to punish Jason by murdering Aeson, the hero's father (1.700–29). Meanwhile Alcimede and Aeson are consulting the spirit of the late Cretheus, Aeson's father (1.730–51). Cretheus informs them of the violent death awaiting Aeson at the hands of Pelias and suggests suicide as a preferable option (1.747–51). Aeson accepts this advice and Alcimede insists that she should join him in his death (1.752–66). The suicide that follows recalls those of certain notable figures in the Neronian period (cf., e.g., Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60–4, 70; 16.11, 17, 19, 34–5). The king sends soldiers to storm the house and carry out the deed (1.753–4; 1.819–20). By the time the soldiers arrive, however, the victims are already at the brink of death (1.821–3). The suicides of Aeson and Alcimede, then, recall recent events in Rome. This Roman aura betrays the existence of some symbolic significance. Valerius' portrayal of Aeson and Alcimede does in fact recall the lives and deaths of Thrasea Paetus and his wife, Arria (Tac. *Ann.* 16.34–5). Thrasea Paetus was an eminent figurehead of the senatorial class that had suffered so severely under Nero. No fear had prevented him from standing up to the emperor on behalf of the senate and from protecting the emperor's critics (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.49; 14.12, 48–9; 16.22, 24). This independent attitude annoyed Nero and ultimately led to his death (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 16.21). Thrasea was allowed to choose the means of death and had the veins in his arms severed (Tac. *Ann.* 16.35). The pro-senatorial Tacitus regarded this death as

[101] Camps (op. cit. (n. 52), pp. 29–30) claims that the relationship of Cleopatra with Mark Antony also 'coloured Virgil's story of the doings of Dido and Aeneas: they too are said to be "heedless of honour and dignity", and rumour has it that they have become "slaves of a shameful infatuation, sunk in wanton pleasuring together all the winter long" [*Aen.* 4.221; 4.193–4]'.

the destruction of virtue itself (*Ann.* 16.21). Valerius' Aeson, like Thrasea Paetus, is an eminent and noble figure who is suffering at the hands of the ruling tyrant; he too seems to have a close relationship with the local *patres*; cf., e.g.,

> populumne levem veterique tyranno
> infensum atque olim miserantes Aesona patres
> advocet? (1.71–3)

In committing suicide along with her husband, Alcimede shares a common will with Arria (Tac. *Ann.* 16.34). As Arria's mother had committed suicide alongside her husband Caecina Paetus, so she too wanted to share Thrasea's fate. Unfortunately, at the point at which Thrasea begs her to live in order to look after their daughter, the archetype of Tacitus' *Annals* breaks off, denying the modern world precise details of her fate. In their desire not to be parted from their husbands by death, however, Arria and Alcimede bear obvious similarities.

Valerius' account of the fate of Aeson and Alcimede does not end with their death. The poet goes on to recount that both they and their young child are rewarded in the afterlife by entry into Elysium (1.827–51). According to Valerius, the door of Elysium opens in the following circumstances:

> siquando pectore ductor
> vulnera nota gerens, galeis praefixa rotisque
> cui domus aut studium mortales pellere curas,
> culta fides, longe metus atque ignota cupido;
> seu venit in vittis castaque in veste sacerdos. (1.836–40)

The implication of this statement is that Aeson fulfilled these criteria. With this statement, then, Valerius reinforces the symbolic relationship between Aeson and Thrasea Paetus. The man who strives to dispel mortal anxieties, who observes loyalty, to whom fear and desire are unknown may clearly be identified as an adherent of the Stoic philosophy. Such a man was Thrasea. Thrasea, moreover, held the office of a *quindecimvir sacris faciundis* (Tac. *Ann.* 16.22). In this capacity he again qualifies for entry into Elysium according to the criteria stated by Valerius in the last line of the passage quoted above.

The familial relationship that existed mythologically between Aeson, Alcimede and Jason clearly has no direct parallel on the symbolic level of meaning. Thrasea Paetus and Arria were not physically related in any way to Vespasian. We should not, however, assume that the parallelism breaks down at this point by oversight. I believe that the symbolic relationship between Aeson, Alcimede and Jason and Thrasea, Arria and Vespasian was designed deliberately to suggest a close relationship between the Roman threesome akin to that between parents and a child. This relationship is not a physical one but a spiritual one. Valerius, I believe, intends to portray Vespasian as the spiritual offspring of the senatorial class. This portrayal conforms well with what we know of Vespasian's attitude towards the senatorial class. Vespasian, indeed, could not have differed more from Nero in this respect. The coinage of the period bears witness to this difference. In the early years of Vespasian's reign, coins were struck with the legend *Libertas Restituta S.C.*; these coins depicted Vespasian assisting Liberty to her feet and Rome standing on the right.[102] Other coins bear the legends S.P.Q.R. OB CIVES SERVATOS or S.P.Q.R. ADSERTORI LIBERTATIS PUBLICAE within oak-wreaths.[103] Other significant coin-legends of the period

[102] Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 49), p. xlvii; H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage* II (London, 1926), p. 68 (no. 430).

[103] Mattingly, ibid.; Mattingly and Sydenham, ibid., pp. 70, 79 (nos. 455–9, 547) *et passim*.

include *Libertas Augusti*, *Libertas Publica*, *Concordia Senatui* and *Senatus Pietati Augusti*.[104] Suetonius' biography of Vespasian tells a similar tale. According to Suetonius, Vespasian executed no-one whom he feared or suspected (Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 14). No innocent person was punished during Vespasian's reign 'nisi absente eo et ignaro aut certe invito atque decepto' (Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 15). Financial beneficence was bestowed upon impoverished senators (Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 17). Suetonius, moreover, informs us that Vespasian was concerned throughout his imperial career to present the appearance of *civilitas*: 'Ceteris in rebus statim ab initio principatus usque ad exitum *civilis* et clemens, mediocritatem pristinam neque dissimulavit umquam ac frequenter etiam prae se tulit' (Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 12). Wallace-Hadrill understands *civilitas* to be 'the social etiquette of imperial condescension' which manifested itself in 'the behaviour of a ruler who is still a citizen in a society of citizens'.[105] After the oppression of the Neronian era, then, Vespasian's leniency and tolerant attitude towards the senate must have been a welcome relief. It is to this attitude that Valerius alludes by suggesting a relationship between Vespasian and the senatorial figurehead, Thrasea Paetus.

The above analysis demonstrates the symbolic nature of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. The symbolic substratum concerns the succession of the Flavian dynasty after the demise of the Julio-Claudians. This theme complements Martha Ann Davis's understanding of Argo, the boat under Jason's/Vespasian's command, as a symbol of the Roman state.[106] It incorporates as a central figure of this symbolic understanding the figure of Vespasian, as we are led to expect by the correlation between the poet's summary of his epic and its dedication. This analysis, however, could not be comprehensive within the appropriate length of an article. The characters discussed above will, I believe, repay closer study. Certain others have, I suspect, specific symbolic functions to which I will return. I hope, however, that by presenting the symbolic nature of the *Argonautica* I will at least have succeeded in demonstrating that the *Argonautica* is more than just 'a story of high adventure'[107] and that it deserves much greater attention and respect than it has enjoyed in the past.[108]

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[104] Mattingly and Sydenham, ibid., pp. 67, 68, 72 (nos. 418, 428–9, 474); Mattingly, ibid., p. xlviii. The last legend listed here appears on a posthumous type of Galba. Mattingly (ibid.) interprets it to mean 'the Senate honours Vespasian for his piety towards his predecessor [Galba]'.

[105] A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King', *JRS* 72 (1982), 42–8.

[106] See above, p. 218.

[107] Garson, art. cit. (n. 1), 114.

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