

## ‘APOLLO OF THE SHORE’: APOLLONIUS OF RHODES AND THE ACROSTIC PHENOMENON

*À la mémoire de Jean-Marie Jacques, 1924–2008*  
*‘is certissimus repertor’*

*Ἐνθεν δ’ αὖ λαῦγγας ἁλὸς σχεδὸν ὀχλίζοντες,  
νῆον αὐτόθι βωμὸν ἑπάκτιον, Ἀπόλλωνος  
Ἀκτίου Ἑμβασιόιο τ’ ἐπώνυμον.* (Argon. 1.402–4)

In 1991 James J. O’Hara drew attention to a Virgilian allusion to the altar of Apollo Actius at *Argon.* 1.403–4, which functions as an aetiology for Augustus’ quinquennial games in celebration of the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at *Aen.* 3.280:<sup>1</sup>

*lustramurque Iovi votisque incendimus aras,  
Actiaque Iliacis celebramus litora ludis.* (Aen. 3.279–80)

In 1995 Robert Albis isolated another Apollonian wordplay in the same Argonautic passage, this time alluding to the Prologue to Callimachus’ *Aetia*: *ἑμβασιόιο τ’ ἐπώνυμον* in *Argon.* 1.404 neatly inverts all we can read of line 12 of *Aetia* 1 f. 18 Pf., *ἐπώνυμον Ἑμβασιόιο*. Fifteen lines later *Argon.* 1.418–19 echo lines 6–7 of the same *Aetia* fragment, and *ἐπαίτιος* in 1.414 is a cryptic reference to the name of the *Aetia*, signposted by a second *ἐπώνυμον* in line 412:<sup>2</sup>

*Κλυθι, ἄναξ Παγασάς τε πόλιν τ’ Αἰσωνίδα ναίων  
ἡμετέροιο τοκῆος ἐπώνυμον, ὃς μοι ὑπέστης  
Πυθοῖ χρειομένῳ ἄνυσιν καὶ πείραθ’ ὁδοῖο  
σημανέειν, αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐπαίτιος ἔπλεν ἀέθλων·  
αὐτὸς νῦν ἄγε νῆα σὺν ἄρτεμέεσσιν ἑταίροις  
κεῖσέ τε καὶ παλινόρσον ἐς Ἑλλάδα. Σοὶ δ’ ἂν ὀπίσσω  
τόσπων ὅσσοι κεν νοστήσομεν ἀγλαὰ ταύρων  
ἱρὰ πάλιν βωμῷ ἐπιθήσομεν· ἄλλα δὲ Πυθοῖ,  
ἄλλα δ’ ἐς Ὀρτυγίνην ἀπερείσια δῶρα κομίσσω.* (Argon. 1.411–19)

The preceding *ἐπώνυμον*–*ἄκτιος* wordplay in 1.403–4 sets up the more subtle play with *ἐπώνυμον*–*αἴτιος* in 412–14, with recovery of both *ἄκτιος* and *αἴτιος*

<sup>1</sup> J.J. O’Hara, ‘Etymological wordplay in Apollonius of Rhodes, *Aeneid* 3, and *Georgics* 1’, *Phoenix* 44 (1991), 370–6. My thanks are due to the anonymous reviewer at *CQ* for helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> R.V. Albis, ‘Jason’s prayers to Apollo in *Aetia* 1 and the *Argonautica*’, *Phoenix* 49 (1995), 104–9; on ‘signposting’ (*ἐπώνυμον*) see O’Hara (n. 1), 370 n. 3. Apollonius employs *καλέω* and compounds in similar fashion (cf. *μετακλείουσ’ Argon.* 2.296–7).

effected by the same operation: removal of the prefix ἐπ-.<sup>3</sup> But analysis of this densely allusive section of the *Argonautica* may be extended in two directions: by comparison with Aratus' *Phaenomena*, and by a closer examination of the Virgilian echoes.

At 1.361 Jason anticipates the sacrifice and prayer to Apollo with the statement that the god had promised 'to reveal the paths of the sea': *σημανέειν δείξειν τε πόρους ἄλός*. Fifty lines later Jason again reminds Apollo of his oracular promise to signpost their journey in 1.413–14: *πείραθ' ὁδοῖο | σημανέειν, αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐπαίτιος*. Although *σημαίνω* is not an unusual choice of verb in the context of Apollo and prophecy, 1.361 is a variation on *Phaen.* 6: *δεξιὰ σημανίνει*, and further unmistakable allusions to the *Phaenomena* follow.<sup>4</sup> Aratus uses *σημαίνω* to great effect, particularly in the prologue (6, 12) as part of the central theme of Zeus revealing signs to men, and more significantly in the thirty lines containing the notorious acrostics between 783 and 812.<sup>5</sup> At *Phaen.* 808 *σημαίνει* is the starting point for the third acrostic, the partial or 'failed' *ΣΕΜΕ(Ι)Η* of lines 808–12, in the classic 'gamma' style in which the acrostic word is identical with or closely related to the first word in the first line of the acrostic, and to which all three of the Aratean acrostics conform.<sup>6</sup>

In this context of *Phaenomena*-allusion we should be alive to further echoes in this section of the *Argonautica*, particularly to the acrostic cluster. The first two Aratean acrostics, *ΛΕΠΤΗ* and *ΠΑΣΑ* are preceded by a signpost in the form of an imperative *σκέπτεο*, 'be watchful', in 778 and 799; an acrostic that occurs hundreds of lines into a poem rather than in the opening lines requires a 'signpost', for to do without is positively to invite oblivion. The imperative *κλῦθι* 'hear, attend' at *Argon.* 1. 411, immediately preceding *ἐπώννυμον* in 412 and followed by *σημανέειν* and *ἐπαίτιος* in 414, is, again, not out of place in a prayer addressed to Apollo.<sup>7</sup> Yet given several other echoes of the same *Phaenomena* passage in these lines, *κλῦθι* may also be viewed as an *oppositio in imitando* of *σκέπτεο*, and there are still more reasons to assume that *κλῦθι*, *σημανέειν* and *ἐπ-αίτιος* / *ἐπ-άκτιον* in *Argon.* 403–14 bear more than a chance resemblance to Aratus' *σκέπτεο*, *σημαίνειν* and the *ΛΕΠΤΗ* and *ΣΕΜΕ(Ι)Η* acrostics in *Phaen.* 778–812.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Aeneid* passage quoted above Virgil constructs a wordplay which alludes to this section of the *Argonautica*, where *Actia* allows him an *aition* for Augustus'

<sup>3</sup> Albis (n. 2), 109. On *αἴτιος* and *Aetia* cf. *AP* 11.275: *αἴτιος ὁ γράψας Αἴτια Καλλίμαχος*, Albis (n. 2), 108.

<sup>4</sup> On the frequency of Aratean echoes in the *Argonautica* see D. Kidd, *Aratus' Phaenomena* (Cambridge, 1997), 38–9, and G. Boesch, *De Apollonii Rhodii elocutione*, diss. Berlin (Göttingen, 1908), 51–4.

<sup>5</sup> The discovery of the first of the three Aratean acrostics was the outstanding contribution to Hellenistic scholarship of Jean-Marie Jacques in 'Sur un acrostiche d'Aratos', *REA* 62 (1960), 48–61. See also W. Levitan, 'Plexed artistry: three Aratean acrostics', *Glyph* 5 (1979), 55–68; P. Bing, 'A pun on Aratus' name?', *HSPH* 93 (1990), 281–5.

<sup>6</sup> On gamma and Hellenistic acrostics generally see J. Danielewicz, 'Further Hellenistic acrostics: Aratus and others', *Mnemosyne* 58 (2005), 321–34.

<sup>7</sup> With *ἄναξ* at *Il.* 16.514 and *Od.* 5.445. On Virgil's echo of Aratus' *σκέπτεο πρῶτον* signalling his own acrostic at *G.* 1.424–37 see D. Feeney and D. Nelis, 'Two Virgilian acrostics: *certissima signa*?', *CQ* n.s. 55 (2005), 644–6 at 645.

<sup>8</sup> On an intriguing acrostic allusion to the Aratean *ΠΑΣΑ* in Theocritus see now J.J. Clauss, 'Once upon a time on Cos: a banquet with Pan on the side in Theocritus *Idyll* 7', *HSPH* 101 (2003), 289–302.

newly founded games at *Actium*. In the Argonautic passage *AKTIA* is spelled out acrostically in lines 415–19, in other words immediately following *κλῦθι, ἐπώνυμον, σημανέειν* and *ἐπαίτιος* in 411–14:

αὐτὸς νῦν ἄγε νῆα σὺν ἀρτεμέεσσιν ἐταίροις  
 κείσέ τε καὶ παλινόρσον ἐς Ἑλλάδα. Σοὶ δ' ἂν ὀπίσσω  
 τόσων ὅσσοι κεν νοστήσομεν· ἀγλαὰ ταύρων  
 ἱρὰ πάλιν βωμῶ ἐπιθήσομεν· ἄλλα δὲ Πυθοί,  
 ἄλλα δ' ἐς Ὀρτυγίην ἀπερείσια δῶρα κομίσσω. (Argon. 1.415)

Whether or not this acrostic is deliberately intended by Apollonius is a side issue as far as the *Virgilian* echo is concerned: Virgil was aware of the phenomenon, whether genuine or accidental, and echoed it in his construction. Aratus echoed the coincidental *AEYKH* acrostic lurking in *Il.* 24.1–5, for the genuine *AEIITH* is clearly modelled on the accidental *AEYKH*.<sup>9</sup> But the question of authorial intent is deeply relevant to the *Argonautica*: is there any evidence to support the claim that the word *ἄκτια* was genuinely intended as an acrostic by Apollonius Rhodius?<sup>10</sup>

The Homeric *AEYKH* acrostic is deemed accidental on the grounds that the acrostic word does not appear in nor is elicited in any way by the text bounded by the acrostic, nor does that text form a unit, whereas for example the five lines that make up the genuine *AEIITH* acrostic form one complete thought or sentence. If the *Argonautica* passage were also to fail these conditions and produce nothing further in terms of motivation for the acrostic, then we should conclude that the acrostic pattern of lines 415–19 is purely coincidental.

The second condition is easily satisfied: 415–19 form a complete self-standing unit, beginning with *αὐτὸς νῦν ἄγε νῆα* and ending with the Callimachean *ἀπερείσια δῶρα κομίσσω*, before Jason invokes the god anew and in a different vein (*νῦν δ' ἴθι*) in the next line. The first condition is satisfied, I would argue, by the presence of *ἐπαίτιος* in the line immediately preceding the acrostic, while the important first or ‘gamma’ word of the acrostic itself is *αὐτός*, addressed to Apollo as *ἐπαίτιος* of the Argonauts’ expedition once again in the preceding line, and as *Ἄκτιος* in 404.

Apollo, for all his absence, is claimed as a vital and indeed initiatory presence at the very beginning of the poem: 1.1 *Ἀρχόμενος σέο Φοῖβε*, 1. 5: *Τοίην γὰρ Πελίης φάτιν ἔκλυεν*. It is Apollo’s prophecy that initiates the drama and forces Pelias to act, and it is Apollo that the narrator chooses as his specific point of departure for the epic, a point that is echoed in 1.414 when Jason refers to Actian Apollo as *ἐπαίτιος* of the Argonautic expedition. Moreover as David Wray has suggested, the repetition of *αὐτός* referring to Apollo at 414–15 also puts the *end* of the poem, when the Argonauts arrive back on Pagasaeon shores – *ἄκράς* – in

<sup>9</sup> On *AEYKH*–*AEIITH* see Jacques (n. 5), 51; on Greek acrostics in general see E. Vogt, ‘Das Akrostichon in der griechischen Literatur’, *A&A* 13 (1967), 80–95, and E.-R. Schwinge, *Künstlichkeit von Kunst, Zetemata* 84 (Munich, 1986), 84. On Virgilian acrostics see E.L. Brown, *Numeri Vergiliani, Coll. Latomus* 63 (Brussels, 1963), 96–114, and Feeney and Nelis (n. 7), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> That Aratus’ acrostic was known among the early Alexandrians is evident from the three *leptos* epigrams of Callimachus (E. 27 Pf.), Leonidas of Tarentum (*AP* 9.25) and Ptolemy Philadelphus (*SH* 712).

the very last line of the epic (4.1781), under Apollo's protection: the protection of Apollo 'of the shore'.<sup>11</sup>

Now according to the *Suda* entry under ἄκτια (1037.1) Callimachus himself wrote on 'Actian' games: Ἀκτια· ἀγῶν παλαιός, ὡς Καλλίμαχος ἐν τῷ περὶ τῶν Ἀγώνων δῆλον ποιεῖ. Long before Augustus founded his own Actian Games, Callimachus wrote on this 'ancient contest', τὰ ἄκτια. Whatever else he might have said about the games at Actium and how his treatment of the subject might possibly have prompted Apollonius', and ultimately Virgil's, allusion to them in this way appears to be irrecoverable. But given the three references to the *Aetia* prologue already embedded in the passage, the first eleven lines before the beginning of the acrostic, the second in the line immediately before it and the third in its last two lines, a further Callimachean reference is far from surprising.

We have then an acrostic that would appear to represent 1) Apollonius' homage to Aratus' poetics and ingenuity, 2) Apollo's quixotic role as guide, and 3) Callimachus' prologue to the *Aetia* and his treatment of the *Aktia* games. Let us now return briefly to 1) and ask whether Aratus' is the only acrostic that Apollonius is paying tribute to.

Historians of the battle of Actium have long noted an apparent geographical confusion between the cultic sites of Actian and Leucadian Apollo among the Augustan poets, notably Propertius 3.11.69–70 and 4.6.17 and the Virgilian passage with which we began.<sup>12</sup> Commentary on this issue extends back at least to the Propertian commentator Beroaldus in the fifteenth century, and most recently James L. Butrica has argued from a number of sources that Apollo Actius must have been a cult name of Apollo Leucatas.<sup>13</sup> But we noted above that the starting point for Aratus' genuine acrostic *ΛΕΙΠΤΗ* is the accidental Homeric *ΛΕΥΚΗ* of *Il.* 24.1–5, and it now seems clear that Apollonius has himself conflated the Pagasaeon/Acarnanian Apollo Actius with the Leucadian variety, well known for the legend of sacrificial and suicidal leaps from the notorious White Rock. Like Aratus before him, Apollonius has modelled his own ingenious acrostic after Homer's accidental *ΛΕΥΚΗ*, embedded in a striking allusion to Callimachus. Apollonius' allusion to Aratus' *ΛΕΙΠΤΗ* is in a sense an 'unmaking' of it, and a return to the (albeit false!) original. The result is a striking conflation of Apollo Actius of Pagasae, of the Actian Games and of Leukas in a neatly triangular, simultaneous evocation of the three poets Callimachus, Aratus and Homer:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} A.K.T.I.A. & \rightarrow & A.E.II.T.H. \\ & \searrow \quad \swarrow & \\ & A.E.Y.K.H. & \end{array}$$

<sup>11</sup> D. Wray, 'Apollonius' masterplot: narrative strategy in *Argonautica* I', in M.A. Harder, R.F. Regtuit and G.C. Wakker (edd.), *Apollonius Rhodius* (Leuven, 2000), 11–32.

<sup>12</sup> *Aen.* 3.274–80: *Mox et Leucatae nimbose cacumina montis | et formidatus nautis aperitur Apollo*; see also *Ov. Her.* 15.166 and 185–7 and *SH* 982. The temple of Apollo Leucatas was situated at the opposite end of the island from that which faces Actium to the north, at a distance of over 30 miles.

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Butrica, 'Apollo Actius, Apollo Leucadius: a false problem in Latin poetry', in M. Joyal (ed.), *In Altum: Seventy-five Years of Classical Studies in Newfoundland* (St. John's Nfld, 2001), 289–311.

In the five lines of Jason's prayer at *Argon.* 1.415–19, Apollo's aetiological connection to the shore of Pagasae is evoked acrostically and coextensively with Jason's petition for a safe return from the Pagasaeian shore and back again. That the god's relationship to Jason's quest should be signified, at this moment of litoral invocation as the Argo is launched into the sea, by the apparently meaningful yet fiendishly uninterpretable sign that is the acrostic is more than consistent with other equivocal signs and cross-signals emanating from the gods in, for example, Denis Feeney's interpretation of the divine in the *Argonautica*.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it surprising that Virgil playfully alluded to the Apollonian acrostic, as he did the Aratean.<sup>15</sup> Finally the acrostic belongs to Apollonius' local world of Hellenistic *jeux d'esprit* and Callimachean poetics, and in the end it is hardly unlikely that, working in the same epic genre as Homer and Aratus, Apollonius would signal his recognition of their acrostics, accidental and deliberate, through one of his own.

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<sup>14</sup> D. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991), 57–98.

<sup>15</sup> See n. 7. One wonders whether, in the context of the acrostic evoked by *Actia ... litora*, the accompanying *Iliacis ... ludis* in *Aen.* 3.280 could be a passing reference to the epigraphic games of the Augustan Tabulae Iliacae (cf. the 'magic square' messages radiating outward from a central letter in any direction): see N. Horsfall, 'Stesichorus at Bovillae?', *JHS* 99 (1979), 26–48.