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“Apollonius' *Argonautika* and Egyptian Solar Mythology.”

First Published in:
The Classical World 97/2 (2004), 123-136.

APOLLONIUS' ARGONAUTIKA AND EGYPTIAN SOLAR MYTHOLOGY*

. . . πρὶν εἰς Ἑλλάδα κῶας ἰκέσθαι.
 . . . till the fleece came to Hellas. (*Argon.* 3.339)

Few scholars have approached the *Argonautika* with an eye toward ancient Near Eastern mythological parallels, and when they have, their work has appeared methodologically questionable and/or has received little acceptance.¹ As a result, until recently classicists generally have not been encouraged to undertake such comparative work. A welcome exception is the recent work of Susan Stephens.² Stephens has examined a number of allusions to Egyptian mythological traditions in the works of Callimachus, Apollonius, and Theocritus and has helped us to understand them as operating effectively in both Greek and Egyptian worlds.³ Moreover, she has demonstrated how this bicultural form of poetics served to make sense of the often competing styles of Greek and Egyptian kingship that embodied Ptolemaic rule.⁴

For the Ptolemaic court to rule effectively it could not construct itself entirely in the mode of a traditional Greek kingship, but as a Macedonian Greek

* I presented an earlier draft of this essay at "On Board the *Argo* through Time and Media: A Conference on *Argonautika* Studies," at the University of Washington on Nov. 3, 2000. I thank James Clauss and Jackie Murray of the University of Washington, Susan A. Stephens of Stanford University, and Kasia Szpakowska of the University of Wales at Swansea for their helpful comments on that draft.

¹ See, e.g., the works of C. Pichard, *Éphèse et Claros: Recherches sur les sanctuaires et les cultes de l'Ionie du Nord* (Paris 1922); V. Bérard, *Les navigations d'Ulysse*, vol. 4 (Paris 1929) 283-315; M. C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden 1965) 281-82; V. Haas, "Medea und Jason im Lichte hethitischer Quellen," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 26 (1978) 241-53; R. A. Jairazbhoy, "Egyptian Civilization in Colchis on the Black Sea," in R. Rashdi and I. van Setrima, eds., *African Presence in Early Asia* (New Brunswick 1985) 58-63; and M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 2: *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* (New Brunswick 1991) 30-31, 246-47.

² S. A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Berkeley 2003).

³ Stephens' observations build significantly upon the work of D. L. Selden, "Alibis," *CA* 17 (1998) 289-412; and also upon her own works, "Callimachus at Court," in A. Harder et al., eds., *Genre in Hellenistic Poetry*, *Hellenistica Groningana* 3 (Groningen 1998) 167-85; and "Egyptian Callimachus," in L. Lehnus and F. Montanari, eds., *Callimaque: Sept exposés suivis de discussions*, *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique* 48 (Geneva 2002) 236-70. See also the observations of G. Giagrande, "'Arte Allusiva' and Alexandrian Epic Poetry," *CQ* 17 (1967) 85-97, concerning the Alexandrian literati's propensity for exotic mythological and literary allusions.

⁴ Compare what P. Green (*The Argonautika: Apollonios Rhodios* [Berkeley 1997] 227) has referred to as Apollonius' "concern to experiment with different modes of religious discourse," and what R. Hunter ("The Divine and Human Map of the *Argonautika*," *Syllecta Classica* 6 [1996] 21) has called Apollonius' "gestures towards the contemporary."

line occupying and ruling over pharaonic Egypt it strove necessarily to position itself in both cultures. The poets are similarly situated: Callimachus and Apollonius are natives of North Africa, of Cyrene and Alexandria respectively, and a third, Theocritus, was probably resident in Alexandria for some years. . . . [F]ar from being ivory-towered intellectuals indulging in obscurantist aesthetics as a reaction to or withdrawal from unsympathetic imperial practices, these poets were the image makers for the Ptolemaic court. . . . [T]hese three poets experiment by selectively adapting previous Greek mythological and historical models to articulate a novel kind of kingship, and it is within this context that their generic experiments should be understood.⁵

Ultimately, such experiments served also to position Egyptian ideas well within the orbit of Greek cultural understanding,⁶ and thus to make Egypt appear a bit more Greek.

On a more sophisticated level, the Alexandrian poets engage in similar creative gestures that serve to domesticate or rather Hellenize Egypt. Callimachus, Theocritus, and Apollonius experiment with templates to incorporate Egyptian myths and pharaonic behavior into Greek. What begins as alien or outré, by being matched with Greek myths of a similar contour, can become familiar, acceptable, even normative.⁷

Stephens' observations provide an especially useful conceptual framework for a number of additional examples, not noted by her, of the poetic interplay between Greek and Egyptian traditions in Apollonius' *Argonautika*.⁸ These examples fit into three categories: the golden fleece, the *Argo* and its crew, and the journey and mission of the Argonauts, each of which, I shall argue, exploits the mythological

⁵ Stephens (above, n.2) 12.

⁶ Note also, with P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, vol. 1 (Oxford 1972) 512, that the work *Egyptian Colonies*, authored by Callimachus' student Istrus, "evidently attempted to find a mythological Egyptian eponym or an Egyptian origin, within the accepted framework of Greek legend, for the cities of Greece, and thus was hardly novel, for such 'Egyptomania' was abroad before Istrus, and had been elaborated fifty or more years before him by Hecataeus from whom Istrus may have derived the general notion." On earlier Greek views on Egypt see now also Stephens (above, n.2) 22-44.

⁷ Stephens (above, n.2) 8.

⁸ After submitting this article for publication, Stephens' work, *Seeing Double* (above, n.2), appeared. The reader will doubtless notice some overlap between the contents of her book and this article. This is both because I provided Stephens with an unpublished form of my article, which she cites in her book with permission, and because I was able to incorporate some of her observations into the revised and published version of this article before it went to press.

imagery associated with the cult of Re, a god whom the Greeks equated with Zeus in the form of Amun-Re.⁹

First the fleece. From a Hellenistic perspective, one can understand why Apollonius was attracted to stories of the golden fleece. Its traditions were powerful and mythic, and like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, represented Hellenism's heroic past. The fleece provided Apollonius' own day with a symbolic reminder of Hellenic power, both past and present. Yet, at the same time, it would have been difficult for a reader of the *Argonautika* living in Egypt not to think also of what was perhaps the quintessential Egyptian icon of his day: that of the image of the god Amun-Re. A common image associated with Amun-Re is that of a ram,¹⁰ often adorned in gold overlay and protected by a magic serpent on his brow, or uraeus.¹¹ In Egyptian belief, the uraeus protected pharaohs and other gods from the magic and ill will of their enemies.¹² Confronted with such images of the ram adorning the uraeus, either by way of ubiquitous temple reliefs or Egypt's many cultic festivals,¹³ Apollonius and his readers, I submit, would have been reminded of the golden fleece and its protective serpent. Indeed, such a context helps to explain the strange glow that the fleece emits, which lights Jason's path when returning to the *Argo*, and which appears to his crew as the lightning of Zeus (4.183–185), for Amun-Re is the Sun, and his radiance, like other Egyptian gods, is said to possess a golden hue.¹⁴

⁹ I question whether Apollonius would have been able to, or would have cared to, distinguish the highly nuanced differences between the various manifestations of the solar god, whether in the form of Re, Atum-Re, Re-Harakhty, or Amun-Re, each of whose mythologies shares overlapping features and whose iconographic representations, at times, might easily be confused, even by today's specialist. In this regard I note that the features of the solar cult which appear to have attracted Apollonius often derive from differing mythologies and representations of the various solar cults enumerated above. For this reason, in what follows I shall refer somewhat interchangeably to Re or Amun-Re, except when discussing a particular text, at which time I shall refer to the specific name as given in the text.

¹⁰ Though from very early times Amun was associated with a ram (and also a goose), he was not frequently represented as a ram before the Ptolemaic period. See V. A. Tobin, "Amun and Amun-Re," in D. B. Reford, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford 2001) 84. In earlier times an anthropomorphic statue of Amun-Re resided in the innermost sanctum of his temple and was hidden from public view. See E. Hornung, *Conceptions of Gods in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, tr. J. Baines (Ithaca 1982) 135–36. On the iconographic representations of Amun, see E. Otto, *Ancient Egyptian Art: The Cults of Osiris and Amon*, tr. K. Bosse-Griffiths (New York 1967).

¹¹ See, e.g., the finial representations on the prow and stern of Amun's solar barque at Karnak (R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *The Temples of Karnak* [Rochester, Vt., 1999] pls. 80–81).

¹² See R. K. Ritner, "O. Gardiner 363: A Spell against Night Terrors," *JARCE* 29 (1990) 25–41; and *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 54 (Chicago 1993) 85–86.

¹³ See Stephens (above, n.2) 6, 44–48, for a discussion of how Greeks might have been exposed to such images and concepts.

¹⁴ Compare, e.g., what is said about pharaoh Hatshepsut (also divinized as a god): "Her skin was gilded with white gold, glittering, as the stars do, within the

Moreover, the symbolic associations of the golden fleece and the icon of Amun-Re also overlap. Since Amun-Re was a celestial equivalent of the pharaoh, as was the falcon-god Horus, he stood as a primary symbol of kingship as the "son of Re." Similarly, the fleece too, as Peter Green reminds us, "was a magical symbol: of supernatural power, entitlement, above all kingship."¹⁵ Thus, the golden fleece served Apollonius as a polyvalent icon combining Greek and Egyptian concepts.¹⁶

The fleece and Amun-Re have more in common than just their physical resemblance and symbolic associations. Of import is the *Argo* itself and its crew, a magic boat, manned by sons of gods and equipped with a prophetic keel.¹⁷ Its captain, Jason, bore a name meaning "healer."¹⁸ The parallel to Re mythology is striking. A common depiction of Re is that of him sailing on his magic solar boat. He too is associated with healing.¹⁹

Like the *Argo*, Re's boat was manned by sons of gods. In the *Book of Amduat*,²⁰ the crew of Re's boat stands on board ready to assist him in battle. Ahead of the boat, a magician kills the cosmic serpent Apep, a figure to whom I shall return. The parallel between the two divine crews becomes more poignant when we recall Apollonius' reference concerning the crewman Aithalides, who spent half of his time in Hades and the other half in the world of

festival hall, before the entire land," cited by Hornung (above, n.10) 134. On the radiance of Amun, see Hornung (above, n.10) 197.

¹⁵ Green (above, n.4) 40. Though Green does not explain the fleece's symbolic association with kingship, I need only mention that gold is commonly associated with kings in Greece as it is in Egypt, whence the Aegean world imported much of its ancient gold. See M. D. Higgins, "Gold," in G. Speake, ed., *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, vol. 1 (London 2000) 678–80.

¹⁶ The comment of R. B. Finnestad ("Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient Tradition in New Contexts," in B. E. Shafer, ed., *Temples of Ancient Egypt* [Ithaca 1997]) is apposite: "[T]here were areas of agreement between Egyptian and Hellenistic kingship ideologies. For example, the concept of the king as both the state and the state's link with world order is found in Greek-Hellenistic thought. The king's engagement in religious matters was in agreement with both Egyptian and Greek-Hellenistic kingship ideology" (231).

¹⁷ Aischylos' *Argo* has Athena providing the speaking timber for the vessel (*TrGF*, frags. 20, 20aR), and Pherekydes notes the same (*FGrHist*, 3F111). Apollonius does, too, but states the place of the timber's origin as Dodona. As T. Gantz (*Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, vol. 1 [Baltimore 1996]) notes, "[B]ut the beam plays a surprisingly limited role in his poem, encouraging the crew when they first board the ship, and telling them of Zeus' anger after the slaying of Apsyrtos (AR 1.524–527; 4.580–591)" (343).

¹⁸ Astour (above, n.1) 281–82 sees the myth of Jason as the remnant belief in a healer-god married to a healer-goddess (Medea). He views this also as hinted at by the fact that he was taught by the wise physician Centaur Cheiron, an honor he shares with Aesclepius. For Astour's other relevant views see *Hellenosemitica* (above, n.1).

¹⁹ More precisely it is Re in the form of Horus and also the solar boat that are associated with medicine and healing. See G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin 1994) 140–46.

²⁰ And also in the *Book of Gates*.

the sun (1.640–648).²¹ This is reminiscent of the journey taken by Re, who spends half of the day sailing the heavens and the other half in the underworld.²²

Like the *Argo*, whose keel possessed prophetic power because it was made of wood taken from a sacred tree at the sanctuary at Dodona, Amun-Re's boat also served as an oracle. In ritual public processions, spectators would approach the boat, ask it a question, and would receive a yes or no response based on the way it tipped, working much the same way as a Ouija board.²³ The boat was thus prophetic.

In the Middle Kingdom *Coffin Texts* (e.g., Spell 404, CT 181–200) and again in the later *Book of the Dead* (Spell 99, below),²⁴ we find that the prophetic nature of Re's nocturnal boat²⁵ derives from the materials from which it was built. In fact, each of the boat's constituent parts was identified with a god. Excerpts from the magical spell in which the boat's parts are called by name read as follows:

"SAY MY NAME," said the sail.

"Nut," is your name.

"SAY MY NAME," said the oar-loops.

"You have been made with the hide of the Mnevis-bull and the tendons of Seth," is your name.

"SAY MY NAME," said the oars.

"The fingers of Horus the elder," are your names.

"SAY MY NAME," said the bailer.

"The hand of Isis which swabs up the blood from the Eye of Horus," is your name.

"SAY MY NAME," said the ribs which are in her timbers.

"Imsety, Hapi, Da-mutef, and Qebehsenuf. . . ," are your names.

²¹ In this Apollonius references *Od.* 11.303. Pindar emphasizes many times that the ship's crew are all sons of gods. Other traditions include a mortal or two, usually a seer. Pherekydes also mentions that the crew included Aithalides, who, according to Gantz (above, n.17), "had received as a gift from Hermes that his *psychê* should be part of the time in Hades, part of the time above ground (*FGrHist.* 3F109; cf. AR. 1.640–648 where the tale is repeated and he functions as a herald)" (343).

²² The focus on Aithalides allows Apollonius to underscore the punning etymology of his name, specifically the prefix *Aiθ-* meaning "burning, fiery," thus associating him with the children of Helios.

²³ See S. Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, tr. D. Lorton (Ithaca 2000; first pub. 1960) 96–98.

²⁴ R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Austin 1985) 95–96.

²⁵ While Egyptians appear to have distinguished Re's nocturnal boat from his solar boat, I contend that such an arcane distinction was unclear to Apollonius, for whom the images would have appeared too similar to differentiate.

The parallel between the solar boat's construction from divine materials and the *Argo's* prophetic keel is particularly close for another reason. Apollonius notes that Athena crafted the *Argo's* keel (1.524–527; 4.580–591). In Ptolemaic Egypt Athena was identified with the goddesses Neit and Amaunet, both wives of Amun-Re.²⁶

Apollonius also was aware of the tradition reported by Herodotus (2.52–60) that the oracle at Dodona was an Egyptian import. According to the latter, two priestesses were abducted by Phoenicians from Thebes. The one was sold in Libya, where she founded the oracle of Amun-Zeus, and the other in Greece, where she founded the oracle at Dodona. Herodotus also reports a native tradition at Dodona that credits the origin of the oracle to two black doves that made their way there from Egypt. The two traditions show variation, but in each, an Egyptian origin is assumed.²⁷ Though the archaeological record of the Dodona sanctuary tells of no Egyptian influence, it is important to recognize that it is the mythological tradition that was familiar to Apollonius.

Moreover, what we know of the Dodona sanctuary informs us that the oracular tree was originally equated with a mother goddess associated with the earth and the underworld.²⁸ Dodona's connection to a chthonic mother goddess, when viewed through an Egyptian lens, would have suggested another parallel to Egyptian solar mythology, that of Isis, the mother of Horus.²⁹ Isis too had underworld associations and was thought of as a mother goddess.³⁰ She also appears in Egyptian art as a sacred tree.³¹ Moreover, in the Graeco-Roman period, the cults of Isis and the solar god Horus had spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean³² and along with them, the Egyptian celestial and nautical symbolism to which they were tied.³³ In addition, Amun-Re's connection to sacred trees was particularly popular in Ptolemaic times, as is seen by temples of the period

²⁶ S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, tr. A. E. Keep (Ithaca 1996) 258, 266.

²⁷ Related in S. I. Dakaris, *Archaeological Guide to Dodona*, tr. E. Kirk (Ioannina 1971) 29.

²⁸ Dakaris (above, n.27) 86. See also W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) 85, 114.

²⁹ Compare the observation of Selden (above, n.3) 289 that Callimachus drew on Horus mythology when composing his *Hymn to Apollo*, and the mythology of Isis' long hair and its astral connections when composing the portion in his *Aitia* known as "Berenice's Lock." For Selden, the purpose of Callimachus' allusions to Egyptian mythology lies in their ability to communicate and mediate the ideology of Ptolemaic kingship for "a society of displaced persons."

³⁰ See V. A. Tobin, "Isis and Demeter: Symbols of Divine Motherhood," *JARCE* 28 (1991) 187–200; and Fraser (above, n.6) 279.

³¹ M.-L. Buhl, "The Goddess of the Egyptian Tree Cult," *JNES* 6 (1947) 80–97.

³² Does the widespread cult of Isis, a goddess of magic, also explain in part the emphasis that Apollonius places on magic as a literary theme? On the spread of Isis in the pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic period, see Fraser (above, n.6) 260.

³³ See, e.g., S. Vinson, *Egyptian Boats and Ships* (Princes Risborough, U.K., 1994). Note also that Isis is equated with the boat's bailer and the boat itself in the *Book of the Dead* (Spell 99). See Faulkner (above, n.24) 96.

which possess topographical lists identifying each district with a description of the trees in its sacred groves. The sycamore, persea, date palm, and acacia are the most common species mentioned,³⁴ and often they are connected with the worship of Amun-Re. One particularly relevant ceremony involved writing the names of the ruling king on the leaves of the sacred persea tree. This ritual served to guarantee the king a long and prosperous life.³⁵

It is in within this context of Ptolemaic interest in the cult of Amun-Re and his sacred groves that we should attach significance to the way Apollonius describes the tree on which the golden fleece was draped. He reports, for example, that before first light, Jason and Medea "followed a pathway that brought them to the sacred grove, in search of that vast oak on which the Fleece was spread out, just like some cloud that blushes ruddy-gold, caught by the fiery rays of the sun at its rising" (4.123-126).³⁶ Note that Apollonius describes the place as a sacred grove (εἶρον ἄλλος) and labels the tree itself an oak, the same tree (φηγός) that was sacred at Dodona.³⁷

Parallels extend to the description of the journey of Re's boat and the journey and mission of the Argonauts. Re's boat embarks on a daily celestial and chthonic journey, beginning as the sun in the east and sailing through the celestial waters of the Milky Way, a place that the Egyptians also called the west and the underworld. His boat travels over the primeval ocean through twelve dangerous regions, where with the help of magicians he defeats the giant chthonic serpent Apep, whom we have seen twice already. Emerging victorious, Re rises in the east as the falcon-king Re-Harakhty, the morning sun.

In the *Argonautika*, Aietes connects the *Argo's* path with a trip he once took in his father's solar chariot (3.309-311). The *Argo*, too, travels through the primeval ocean, where its passengers assist in a battle against a colossal serpent (ὄφις).³⁸ The crew's primary objective was to obtain and protect the golden fleece in much the same way that Re's divine crew protects him on his underworld

³⁴ Buhl (above, n.31) 87.

³⁵ Interestingly, iconographic representations depict this act as performed by the gods Amun-Re, Thoth, god of the scribes, and the librarian goddess, Seshat. See Buhl (above, n.31) 89.

³⁶ Green (above, n.4) 154.

³⁷ Compare 1.527, 4.583.

³⁸ The word choice here also might be significant. Note also that the Septuagint, another product of Ptolemaic Alexandria, renders the primordial serpent of chaos in Isa. 27.1 with ὄφις and δράκοντα. In the account of the Egyptian magicians (Exod. 7.3) we similarly find δράκων for the serpent that came from Moses' staff, though in Exod. 4.3 the same serpent is called ὄφις. Though a relatively common word, one wonders whether ὄφις was chosen for its closeness to Ἀπόπις/Ἀφύφις (= Egyptian ʿ3pp), the giant serpent of the underworld. This would fit well the Ptolemaic flavor of the Septuagint. See, e.g., M. Görg, "Ptolemaische Theologie in der Septuaginta," in H. Maehler and V. M. Strocka, eds., *Das ptolemäische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposiums 27-29 September 1976 in Berlin* (Mainz 1978) 177-85. For the Greek translation of the Egyptian word see Ritner, *The Mechanics* (above, n.12) 212, n.980.

voyage.³⁹ Both journeys require the use of magic before sunrise for protection against giant chthonic serpents.

Re's journey was equated with the sun's circuit through the underworld, and so the texts that detail his nocturnal journey are divided into twelve hours, each of which required of the traveler a difficult test. While these aspects of solar mythology fit the increased Egyptian and Greek interest in astral observations at this time, they also explain Apollonius' repeated emphasis on the sun and its light and suggest the importance of the god Apollo in the Ptolemaic period.

One can hardly flip a page of the *Argonautika* without being told what time of day it is.⁴⁰ Thus, Apollonius tells us that it is only when "early dawn, rising, had cast her light" that Aietes dons a crown that shines like the Sun climbing out of Ocean (3.1224–1230). When Jason and Medea first approach the fleece, they do so before first light. The taking of the fleece too transpires in the middle of the night, since the theft is not discovered until sunrise. When the *Argo's* prophetic keel tells the crew of Zeus' will to punish them with hardships, we hear that some of the crew prayed to "the immortal gods to grant them a safe passage through to Ausonian waters, where they would reach Kirké, daughter of Pérsé and the Sun. Such *Argo's* words as dusk fell" (4.589–592).⁴¹

What is of interest about the solar references in the *Argonautika* is that often they occur in conjunction with the number twelve, the underworld, and serpents, each of which reminds us of Re's underworld battle against the serpent as he passes through the twelve hours of night.⁴²

In book 1, Apollonius alludes to twelve Doliones battle victims slain at night (1.1040–1048).⁴³ With the appearance of the morning star, Herakles' twelve trials are recalled (1.1317), and the storm endured by the *Argo* lasts twelve days and nights (1.1078–1079). Elsewhere the Argonauts offer sacrifices at dawn to the twelve blessed ones (2.531–532), and in book 3 Medea calls upon her

³⁹ Hunter (above, n.4) suggests, "From the point of view of the epic, Hekate's early connection with Persephone and later close association with that goddess allowed Apollonius to create Colchis as a place both of the brilliant sun (Helios) and of the Underworld. . . ." (20). In my opinion, this connection was bolstered for Apollonius by the Egyptian worldview, a view with which, I argue below, he artfully flavored his narrative.

⁴⁰ Green (*Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* [Berkeley 1990]) similarly notes Apollonius' "remarkable awareness of the play and effect of light: dawn glow, the sun's rays glancing off water, the chiaroscuro of fields under mountain peaks" (206).

⁴¹ Green (above, n.4) 166.

⁴² Thus, in my opinion, sunrises and sunsets in the *Argonautika* serve as more than paratextual book-punctuating devices. See also I. J. F. de Jong, "Sunsets and Sunrises in Homer and Apollonius of Rhodes: Book-Divisions and Beyond," *Dialogos* 3 (1996) 20–35.

⁴³ The significance is noted by J. J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts: The Redefinition of the Epic Hero in Book One of Apollonius' "Argonautika"* (Berkeley 1993) 166, n.38. See also Green (above, n.4) 225.

twelve maidens at sunrise (3.838). Medea's magic ointment similarly is mixed at midnight (3.1029). It protects Jason for only twelve hours (3.1050),⁴⁴ and it must be applied at dawn (3.1042).

There also are solar references that remind us of the underworld and serpents. The repeated description of Apollo and all the children of Helios as figures with fiery eyes, upon which the Argonauts could not look directly, is a case in point (4.727-729; see also 4.683-684). Like Re traveling through the underworld, Apollo makes several odd *nocturnal* appearances.⁴⁵ In book 4, Apollonius tells us that before Apollo provided predawn light to direct the boat's way to the island Anaphe, the crew did not know "whether it was in *Hades* or on the sea that they were drifting" (4.1699-1700). Like the chaotic underworld through which Re must sail, the *Argo* too sails into "chaos" (4.1697).⁴⁶ It is before sunrise that the Argonauts witness Apollo traveling from Lykia to the Hyperboreans when Orpheus recalls Apollo's victory over a chthonic serpent (2.674-713), describing Apollo in terms that associate him with the Egyptian god Horus.⁴⁷

One of Herakles' last labors⁴⁸ involves going to a sacred grove and killing *Λάδων*, a giant serpent linked to the underworld (4.1396-1405). In book 3, we read that just after the sun sank "beneath the darkened earth away in the west," the goddess Hekate appears to Jason "entwined with terrible serpents (*δράκοντες*) and oak-leaf saplings (*δρύνιοισι*) . . ." (3.1191-1192, 1214-1215). Just before the prophet Mopsos dies from a snake bite (4.1504-1531), the serpent is described as "avoiding the midday sun" (4.1504) and having a path "to Hades" (4.1509). After the hero is killed, we are told that his body could not be left lying in the sun (4.1529), so the crew dug a deep grave (4.1532). During the *Argo*'s trip home the ship moved over the sea "hour after hour . . . as a snake writhes its coils along a crooked track when the rays of the broiling sun scorch it most fiercely" (4.1541-1547).⁴⁹ This list could be enlarged considerably.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ We are told that it will be effective for just one day.

⁴⁵ For an insightful discussion of Apollo's solar aspects in the poem, see Hunter, "Apollo and the Argonauts: Two Notes on Ap. Rhod. 2, 669-719," *MH* 43 (1986) 50-60, esp. 52-53.

⁴⁶ Hunter ("Greek and Non-Greek in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius," in S. Saïd, ed., *Hellenismos: Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 25-27, Octobre 1989* [Leiden 1991] 81-99 [esp. 98-99]) treats this chaos as representative of the Argonauts' journey into primordial time. Given that the journey itself evokes Egyptian mythology, I see the two approaches as complementary.

⁴⁷ Stephens (above, n.2) 211 notes the mention of Apollo's temporary long hair, an image meant to invoke thoughts of the young Horus wearing "the forelock of immaturity worn by all Egyptian youths, as is seen on the Horus cippus. . . ."

⁴⁸ So Diodorus Siculus 4.26.2. Apollodorus 2.5.11, however, treats this trial as Herakles' eleventh. See Green (above, n.4) 345.

⁴⁹ Green (above, n.4) 166.

⁵⁰ See e.g., Ps.-Eratosthenes, where we find that when Herakles kills the snake in the garden of the Hesperides, it becomes the constellation Ophis/Drako. Herakles

Such references, I suggest, when considered for their combined impact, represent deliberate allusions to Egyptian solar mythology, with its emphases on the number twelve and the sunlight, the hours of the day, serpents, and the underworld. As such they lend considerable weight to Stephens' argument that the events of book 4 of the *Argonautika* allude to Re's journey through the underworld.⁵¹

I also would suggest that since the heavens and their constellations figure so prominently in Egyptian solar mythology, Apollonius' astral references play a similarly allusive role.⁵² The *Book of the Dead* identifies Re's journey through the underworld as a sail across the Milky Way.⁵³ Once the deceased boards the solar boat, he becomes a star. In the *Argonautika* several of the crew members (e.g., Castor, Pollux, and Herakles) become constellations in their own right.⁵⁴ Apollonius often compares the crew with stars, and Jason in particular with a meteor, and twice with the dog star Sirius "springing high into heaven out of Ocean" (3.957).⁵⁵ The *Argo*, too, was a constellation in Ptolemaic times, and it is important to note that the boat's wake lies in the Milky Way. Further, by Apollonius' time, the golden fleece, like Amun-Re, had become a constellation.⁵⁶

Apollonius' integration of Egyptian elements into the *Argo* myth fits well his historical context. The regional authority of the Amun cult increased significantly after the late fourth century B.C.E., when Amun had proclaimed Alexander the Great a son of Amun-Re at the Siwa oasis.⁵⁷ In the Ptolemaic period, the local influence of this and other Amun cults spread. The priestly town of Soknopaiou Nesos, for example, increased the authority of its Sobek cult by incorporating an oracle of Amun into its precinct.⁵⁸ As David Frankfurter

himself is a constellation and is pictured as next to the snake with a raised club (*Cat.* 3, 4), as noted in Green (above, n.4) 412.

⁵¹ Stephens (above, n.2) 218-37.

⁵² See P. L. P. Bogue, "Astronomy in the *Argonautika* of Apollonius Rhodios (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois-Urbana, 1977)," *Dissertation Abstracts* 38 (1978) 6109A. His elaborate celestial and chronological schema is dismissed by Green (above, n.4) 204-5.

⁵³ The book was still being copied in the Ptolemaic period. See A. K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs 332 B.C.-A.D. 642: From Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley 1987) 187.

⁵⁴ See also Green (above, n.4) 204, who notes: "[T]he catasterism rate among the Argonauts and their ancestors is striking."

⁵⁵ Green (above, n.4) 138.

⁵⁶ Eratosth. *Cat.* 19.

⁵⁷ This story is picked up in Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance*, which D. Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* [Princeton 1998]) refers to as "propaganda for Ptolemaic authority" (226). In this text, Amun appears to Alexander's mother, thus playing a pivotal role.

⁵⁸ On this site see T. G. Wilfong, "Dimai (Soknopaiou Nesos)," in K. A. Bard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (London 1999) 309-10. For the papyrological references to this development, see Frankfurter (above, n.57) 160, n.67.

observes, the spread of the Amun cult represents "a new rivalry for regional and transregional authority among the cults of hitherto local significance."⁵⁹

Far from being diminished by the Greek presence and worship of Greek deities, the cults of Egyptian gods generally continued to thrive under the Ptolemies, who made every effort to portray themselves as pious rulers with the divine support of the Egyptian gods. The stele of Mendes demonstrates these efforts. It depicts Ptolemy Philadelphus demonstrating his piety toward Amun, who appears in the form of a ram,⁶⁰ an iconographic representation well-established already in pharaonic times.⁶¹ The accompanying inscription clarifies his role as "The holy ram god, the great god, the life of Amun-Re, the engendering ram . . . the son of Amun-Re . . . the lord of crowns Ptolemy, the ever-living."⁶² Indeed, the Ptolemies not only fully supported the worship of Amun-Re, but appeared themselves on temple walls in pharaonic dress as Horus incarnate, wearing the horned headdress of Amun-Re.⁶³ The image of the king as Amun-Re was even propagated by way of coinage. L. Koenen remarks:

[T]hey [Ptolemaic coins] implied a concept of Egyptian kingship according to which the king is the son of the highest god, of Amun-Re, the Egyptian equivalent of Zeus. The king was believed to have been fathered by his predecessor acting in the role of Amun-Re. . . .⁶⁴

The identification of Zeus with Amun-Re gave rise to changes in Greek religious iconography as well. As a number of surviving figurines from the period show, Zeus began to take on the physical attributes of Amun-Re such as rams' horns and a solar disk, making it clear that Amun-Re and his form as a divine ram enjoyed increasing status in the years before and during the Ptolemies both in the Greek and Egyptian worlds.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Frankfurter (above, n.57) 190.

⁶⁰ For an image and general discussion of this stele, see J. Quaegebeur, "Reines Ptolémaïques et traditions égyptiennes," in Maehler and Strocka (above, n.38) 245-62.

⁶¹ See, e.g., B. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London 1989) 208.

⁶² The translation is that of Quaegebeur (above, n.60) 250.

⁶³ See, e.g., the brief pictographic exposé of D. C. Forbes, "Follies' Crowns of the Ptolemies," *KMT* 7/3 (1996) 45-46.

⁶⁴ L. Koenen, "The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure," in A. Bulloch et al., eds., *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley 1993) 45.

⁶⁵ For the impact in Hellenistic Egypt of Alexander's experience at the oracle of Amun and its resulting apotheosis, see G. Grimm, "Die Vergöttlichung Alexanders des grossen in Ägypten und ihre Bedeutung für den ptolemäischen Königskult," in Maehler and Strocka (above, n.38) 103-12. On the continued significance in the Ptolemaic

Such self- and divine bicultural representation may be seen in tandem with a well-known pattern of Hellenistic adaptation that one finds in a number of Alexandrian religious traditions. Ragnhild Finnestad explains:

The Egyptian traditions, both inside and outside the temple walls, were vital and far from drained of strength, and even in the heavily Hellenistic syncretistic milieus there were obvious Egyptian influences on the Greeks. Before the time of expanding universal religions, the concept that religion belonged to a particular region was deeply rooted in people's thought, and Greek and Romans living in Egypt felt a need to "acclimatize" their gods and religious practices to the place.⁶⁶

Indeed, the Ptolemies put extraordinary means into locating and creating national gods that could be jointly worshiped by Egyptians and Greeks. According to Tacitus and Plutarch,⁶⁷ Ptolemy I had brought the figure of Sarapis to Alexandria from Asia Minor.⁶⁸ Though his plan proved effective for much of the Mediterranean world, Sarapis did not enjoy the interest of the Egyptians themselves,⁶⁹ who preferred their long-standing solar cults of Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Amun-Re. As Siegfried Morenz remarks, "Sarapis's very failure in Egypt shows that the Greek rulers were unable to find a new form that would fit the old content. Sarapis did *not* become what Horus and Amon had been."⁷⁰

Despite the lack of popularity of Sarapis among native Egyptians, Ptolemaic "acclimatization" was extensive. It was not limited to royal and religious iconography, nor to cultic activity, but as Koenen has shown,⁷¹ extended even to the selection of royal titles and the identification of kings with particular myths, all of which, when employed carefully, served as polyvalent markers of both Greek and Egyptian identity.

It is this bicultural context of the Ptolemaic state that informs the *Argonautika's* foregrounding of elements common to Egyptian solar mythology. The *Argonautika*, as much as Apollonius himself, embodies the tremendous change that Alexandrian culture was experiencing under Ptolemaic rule, "from a culture completely Egyptian—the land of the solar journey—to a land of shared cul-

period of Amun (and/or the god Khnum) in the form of a prophesying ram, see L. Kákósy, "Prophecies of Ram Gods," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 19 (1966) 341–58.

⁶⁶ Finnestad (above, n.16) 234.

⁶⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 83; and Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 28.

⁶⁸ As noted by Morenz (above, n.26) 246, 346, n.72.

⁶⁹ See Fraser (above, n.6) 274.

⁷⁰ Morenz (above, n.26) 246. Italics are the author's. For other Egyptian influence on Greek culture, see D. J. Crawford, *Kerkeosiris: An Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period* (Cambridge 1971) 86–92.

⁷¹ On this subject, see the magisterial work of Koenen (above, n.64) 25–115.

ture—Greek language and political dominance on the one hand and Egyptian language, religious beliefs, and economic practices on the other."⁷²

Its subtle *detournement* of earlier tradition within a new bicultural framework marks it as more than just a commitment "to the recovery and reconstitution of the past and its mythic heritage,"⁷³ and its intercultural allusions do not help to characterize it simply as an attempt to expand the cultural territory of Hellenism.⁷⁴ Instead, we must see Apollonius as having "written a poem of and for the new hybrid political state, by retrojecting into the epic past elements of both worlds and by creating an epic template for new beginnings that partakes of both."⁷⁵

Yet despite the bicultural nature of the poetic space created by Apollonius' epic template, it would appear that for Apollonius, the sun ultimately shone on the side of Hellenism. The voyage of the *Argo* itself demonstrates this. The boat journeys to the land of Colchis, to a people whom Apollonius identifies as Egyptian in origin (a report borrowed from Herodotus), whose king, Aietes, bears the title "son of Helios," a calque for the Egyptian king (i.e., "son of Re [the Sun]").⁷⁶ It is a strange world, a stand-in for Egypt.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Apollonius also takes care to create a genealogical connection between one of the Argonauts and the future rulers of Egypt,⁷⁸ thus offering his readers "an expectation that the future home of his heroes will not be Greece but North Africa."⁷⁹ In the end, however, Jason and Medea do not remain in Colchis, but return home, to Hellenism, as it were.⁸⁰

Moreover, even though the *Argo's* journey in book 4 of the *Argonautika* alludes to Re's circuit through the underworld,⁸¹ it is

⁷² Stephens (above, n.2) 236–37.

⁷³ Green (above, n.4) 15.

⁷⁴ With Hunter (above, n.4) 13–27.

⁷⁵ Stephens (above, n.2) 237.

⁷⁶ Astutely espied by Stephens (above, n.2) 176.

⁷⁷ W. Burkert's comment (*Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* [Berkeley 1983]) on the change in the fleece's home as found in Greek traditional sources is apropos: "The old connection with the Argonauts, and the removal of Phrixos and the ram to Aietes, more likely reflect a poetic combination than a cult legend" (114).

⁷⁸ Note the observation of Stephens (above, n.2) 182, for whom "Colchis" is a stand-in for Egypt. As she remarks, Apollonius offers us a story "in which Greece encounters Egypt, recovers from it a most valuable possession (the fleece), which is already Greek . . . and affects a return, during which, again by divine favor, one of the Argonauts is singled out as the ancestor of those Greeks who are destined to inherit North Africa."

⁷⁹ Stephens (above, n.2) 257.

⁸⁰ Compare the words of Green (above, n.40): "But it (the *Argonautika*) is also, at a still-deeper level, a paradigm of the whole Alexandrian search for *ataraxia*. To return to one's familiar beginnings . . . , to close the circle at last . . . is an achievement in itself" (213).

⁸¹ Stephens (above, n.2) 218–37.

important to realize that the *Argo* travels in a direction opposite to that of the Egyptian sun. Re begins in the east and returns to the east, whereas Jason's homeward trek is primarily westward.⁸² Apollonius did not make use of several earlier traditions, including the *Ehoiai*, Hekataios, and Pindar, that have Jason return home by way of Libya and the Nile,⁸³ and though he does bring Jason's homeward journey in line with the *Odyssey*, and also with solar mythology, by sailing the *Argo* past the Island of the Sun (4.659–981), in general he opts for a homebound route that avoids his homeland Libya and Egypt.⁸⁴

From this perspective, we may see Apollonius' *Argonautika* as describing not just a geographical journey but a personal one. On the one hand, his *Argonautika* reasserts the greatness of Hellenism's heroic past and repositions Greek mythological traditions,⁸⁵ especially those connected to Egypt, within Hellenistic cultural boundaries. Yet, on the other, the integration of Egyptian motifs into his epic characterizes those very boundaries as blurry and shifting. After all, Apollonius' world was one in which "the historically potent ethnic categories of Argive, Ionian, Athenian, and Peloponnesian were giving way to the aggregated 'Hellene,' for which the markers of identity were as yet open to negotiation."⁸⁶ I submit that his epic represents just such a negotiation, but in literary form. Apollonius' *Argo* sailed two worlds and consequently, entailed a journey that both called into question what it meant to be a "Hellene" and (even if unconsciously) helped to define the changing and ambiguous cultural contours of Alexandrian identity.⁸⁷

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Classical World 97.2 (2004)

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⁸² Save for the brief eastern trek to the Mediterranean from Syrtes to Lake Tritonis, as noted by Stephens (above, n.2) 224.

⁸³ Gantz (above, n.17) 362.

⁸⁴ In this, he apparently followed the geographer Timagetos. See Gantz (above, n.17) 362. Stephens (above, n.2) 182, notes how Libya "could also serve as a recognizable synecdoche for (at the very least) Alexandrian Egypt in Apollonius."

⁸⁵ Given the plethora of parallels and the lack of folkloric categories to which our parallels belong, it appears unlikely that they represent simply another folkloric motif shared between the Greeks and the Egyptians. The index by S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington 1955–1958), for example, while citing Cinderella as a parallel to the golden fleece (which might have come into the story by way of the Greek myths), contains nothing by way of a ram that speaks, prophesies, heals, has associations with magic or wisdom, nor does it possess any other solar-related feature that appears in the *Argonautika* which might be of use in explaining our comparisons.

⁸⁶ Stephens (above, n.2) 183.

⁸⁷ Note the apposite words of Hunter, *The Argonautika of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (Cambridge 1993) 159: "The story of the Golden Fleece might almost have been designed as a narrative of cultural and racial difference and interaction: a journey to the ends of the earth, a terrible confrontation with the unknown and 'the other,' and the ultimate triumph of a Panhellenic crusade and of Greek technology and daring."